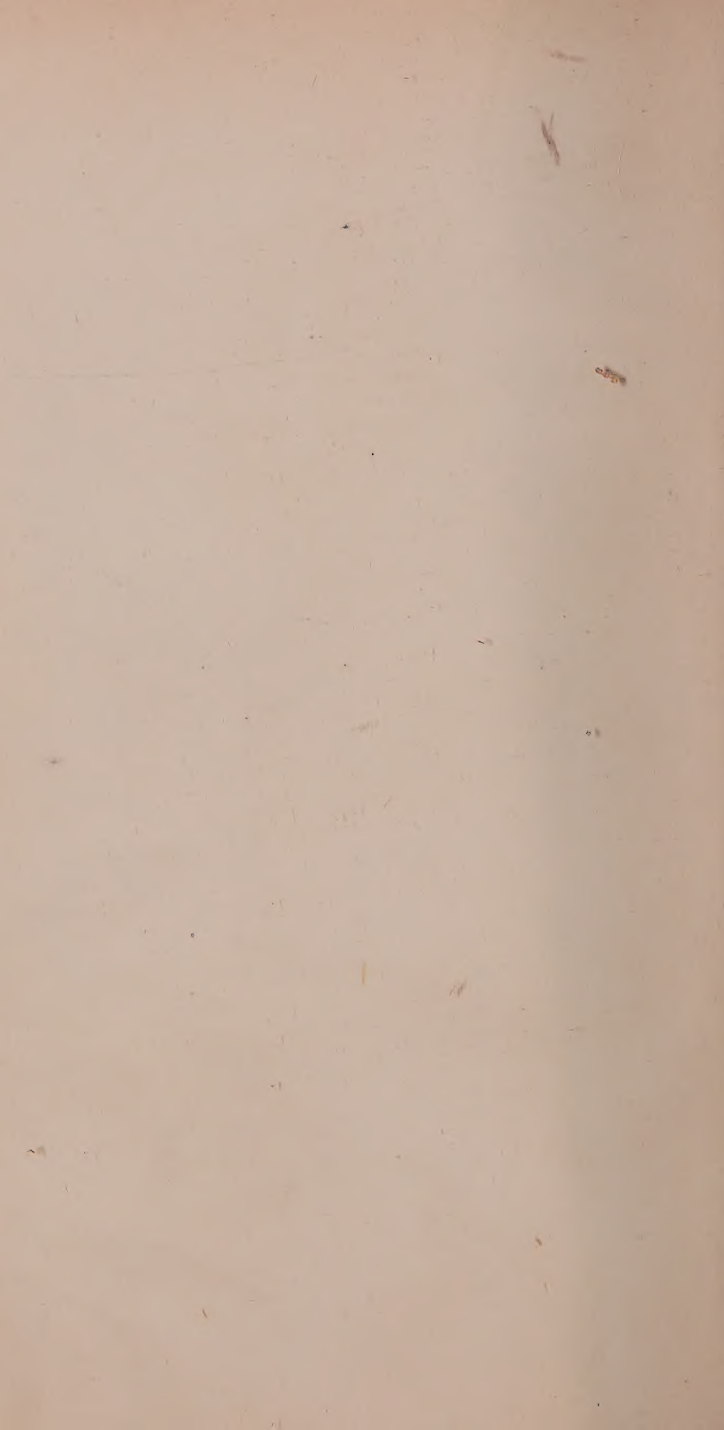


THE LIFE OF
THE BLESSED JULIE BILLIART



QU'EST BON LE
BON DIEU



THE LIFE
OF BLESSED
JULIE BILLIART





B·JULIA BILLIART·VIRGO·CONGREGATIONIS
A DOMINA NOSTRA NUNCUPATAE
FUNDATRIX ET PARENS

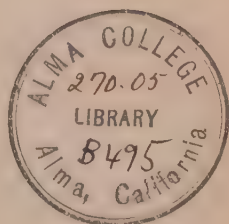
THE LIFE OF BLESSED JULIE BILLIART

Foundress of the Institute of
Sisters of Notre Dame

By a Member of the Same Society.

Edited by the late
Father James Clare S.J.

“Mulierem fortem quis inveniet?
Filiae ejus surrexerunt, et beatissimam
praedicaverunt.” PROV. xxxj



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Nihil Obstat.

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Episcopus Arindelensis,
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PREFACE TO THE PRESENT EDITION.

ELEVEN years have passed since the first publication of the Life of Mère Julie Billiard in English. Within that period the Servant of God has been proclaimed Blessed, and it therefore became necessary to carry on the story of her glorification to the happy consummation of May 13th, 1906, as well as to make certain slight alterations in the original text. But the consultation, in the interests of this revision, of the Acts of the Process, and, yet more, of the collection of Blessed Julie's Letters and Conferences preserved at the Mother-House, Namur, bore strongly in upon the writer the conviction that the first biography was incomplete in detail and in colouring, that certain aspects of the character and influence of the Foundress were in it almost untouched, and that, in fact, the pen should be more largely left in the fingers of Julie herself, or of those who, in one relation or another, had known her personally. The result is a practically new Life. That it should be no mere dead record, but that Blessed Julie should live again in its pages, strong and sweet and ardent, has been the one wish of the writer, and it is to facilitate this realization by

putting the reader in the right imaginative setting that the number of illustrations has been notably increased. Verily, we need to come into touch with her and souls like hers—the peasant curé of Ars, the village maid of Domremy, and other such, whom the Vicar of Christ is so significantly uplifting for our veneration. For in their lives we seem to breathe very specifically that clean and healthful mountain air of unworldliness which is the direct negation of the spirit and teaching of our generation, and which assuredly must be its healing. May these pages fill with it the souls of all who read them; and may they quicken the coming of the day when Julie Billiart's triumph shall be completed, and when, not here alone or there, but throughout the whole church militant, she may be invoked because she stands crowned Saint in the Courts of Him Whose Kingdom is not of this world.

Notre Dame, Mount Pleasant,
Liverpool, March 1, 1909.

WHENEVER the words "Saint," "Miracle," "Revelation," etc., are used in the following Biography, they are to be understood in a purely historical sense, conformably to the decree of Pope Urban VIII.



PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

AMONG the remarkable servants of God who in recent times have exercised signal influence in the cause of religion, and who, by their labours in the education of the young, have promoted and extended the knowledge and love of our divine Lord, and formed loyal children of holy Church, a primary place must be assigned to the Venerable Servant of God, Mother Julie Billiart, the Foundress and first Superioress-General of the distinguished Institute of "the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Namur." In the following pages the reader is made acquainted with the leading events of her life from A.D. 1751 to A.D. 1817, in which latter year it pleased God to crown her arduous labours by a holy death.

Few persons have been endowed with a character and personality so strongly marked, or with qualities so admirably adapted to the great and noble work which Almighty God called upon her to perform. That work was nothing less than the establishment of a society of holy religious consecrated to Him by vows, and devoted to the promotion of His greater glory by the education of children of all classes, training up school-

mistresses, and by aiding the clergy in their apostolic labours according to their institute and calling.

In reading the life of this Venerable Servant of God two great truths are forcibly impressed upon us; truths often inculcated in the sacred writings of the Old and New Dispensations, and exemplified in the lives of the great and good, the special friends of God, as well before as since the coming of our Blessed Lord into the world.

The former of these truths regards the merciful and loving Providence of God towards His chosen people under the Old Law, and towards His holy Church, the Kingdom of His well-beloved Son, in the New Dispensation.

This He manifested in an especial manner, by raising up in times of great danger or adversity those who under His guidance, and endowed by Him with the necessary qualifications, repelled the dangers, and successfully converted adversity into prosperity and glory.

This truth will not be called in question by any one who is even slightly acquainted with the action of God in regard to His people; but we may illustrate by one or two instances.

Six hundred and fifty-seven years before the coming of Christ, the Almighty chose His servant Judith, a holy widow, who by penance and prayer,

and much fasting, prepared herself to carry out the work, to fulfil the destiny for which He called her, namely that of being the saviour of His chosen people.* She went forth from the city of Bethulia, strong in her confidence in God, undaunted by the appalling difficulties of the undertaking, faithful to the call of heaven, and cut off the head of Holofernes, the leader of the army of Nebuchadonosor king of the Medes.

Dismayed and panic-stricken, the soldiers fled, and in their wild confusion fell to mutual slaughter, from which but few escaped to tell the story; and thus her people were freed from the Medish yoke.†

One hundred and fifty years later, when Assuerus was king of Persia and "ruled the nations from Ethiopia even to the Indies," his wicked minister Aman concerted a plot for the destruction of the Jewish nation, in the twenty-fourth year of their captivity at Babylon. It was then that the Providence of God made use of Esther in order to frustrate the impious designs of the enemies of her nation and save them from annihilation.‡

If the Almighty gave such striking proofs of His protecting providence in the Old Law, and chose even frail women to be the instruments for the preservation of his chosen people, what won-

* Judith c. viii.

† Judith xv.

‡ Esther iii-ix.

der if in the New Dispensation He has given us equally striking and more frequent proof of that same all-wise and all-loving providence in regard of His chosen people by excellence, the children of the holy Catholic Church?

The enemies of Israel were many and formidable, but not so terrible, nor so persistent in their efforts as those against whom the Church has to contend, of whom St. Paul writes: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness; against the spirits of wickedness in the high places."* The powers of darkness, the spirit of the world with its false principles and its pernicious examples, the waywardness of human nature, combined with the disloyalty and contumacious perversity of those who have made shipwreck of their faith—all these are ever striving to allure the children of the Church from their allegiance to her authority. This is clear in every epoch of her history. To the executioners of the early ages of Christianity succeeded the heresiarchs of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. Then came the period in which the barbarians from the east and north-east of Europe for well-nigh an equal space of time spread havoc and desolation over the fair fields of Christendom. Against the heresiarchs the Al-

* Ephesians vi, 12,

mighty raised up a body of great, holy and learned men, whom He endowed with those qualities and graces by which they were enabled to refute and confound the enemies of truth. Such were Athanasius, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and a multitude of others.

Against the barbarous invaders who left their passage strewn with ashes or encumbered with corpses, and who seemed to have inflicted a mortal blow on Christian life, the same Almighty Providence raised up the glorious family of St. Benedict. Armed with the crucifix, filled with the Spirit of God, they stemmed the torrent of barbarism, tamed the unbridled passions of these wild hordes, taught them to adore and love the Crucified; and Christian life, which seemed to be hidden in death, sprang up with renewed spiritual energy and fervour throughout the states of Europe. So, too, in the thirteenth century, when the children of the Church were exposed to a new and double danger, on the one hand from the violence and craft of fresh heresies, and on the other from the luxury and sensual indulgence which pervaded the higher classes and threatened to invade even the Sanctuary, we find that same loving Providence selecting a Dominic, a Francis and a Clare, to found religious orders which should repel the threatened dangers, and by means of their followers become

instruments for the salvation of souls in generations still unborn. Again, in more recent times, a new danger, and a new phase of hostility to the Church, and one in some respects more formidable than any which preceded it, was the revolt of the human intellect against the divinely constituted authority of the Church. Its leaders, undermining the very foundations of faith, substituted in its stead human reason and human authority. By flattering the passions, perverting the sacred names of liberty and progress, falsifying history, aspersing with calumny the Vicar of Christ, and invoking the Sacred Scriptures against Him who inspired them, they summoned the Church before their impious tribunals, found her guilty of blasphemy and of seducing the people, and pronounced her worthy of death. In this extremity God was pleased to call forth Ignatius, Teresa and a host of others, who have rescued thousands from spiritual ruin. In our own times another and an appalling effort is being made to undermine and ruin the mystical Body of Christ, by robbing it of that portion which is the most dear to His Sacred Heart, and which is the weakest and least protected, namely the young of all classes, especially the children of the poor. By corrupting the waters of human life at their source the enemies of God and of His Church flatter themselves that they will at length, surely though

gradually, succeed in destroying the kingdom of Christ on earth.

From the beginning of the present century this has been in France the persistent effort of wicked men, who have striven to wrest out of the hands of the pastors of the Church the education of youth of both sexes, and to appoint as professors and teachers of the young persons who, if not openly hostile, are at least indifferent to all religion. The same efforts, but by means if possible more unblushing, are being exerted to the same end in Italy, where not only the faith but the morals of youth are being undermined and destroyed. In England and America the enemies of the Church are energetic and persistent in their endeavours to secularize education, to prevent the teaching of religion, to banish the name of God from the schools, to blot out the thought of Him from the minds, the love of Him from the hearts of children. Were they to succeed, it is clear that the result would be universal corruption; the passions of the soul would be let loose, and men would cease to worship God or practise any religion. To counteract this danger, to prevent this calamity, it has pleased His Divine Majesty to choose, among other instruments of His merciful and loving Providence—and that in an especial manner—the Venerable Servant of God, Mother Julie Billiart. She was called to form

a body of religious who by their Institute were to devote their lives to unremitting labours and self-sacrifice in this noblest of causes,* the education of girls of every station, and especially to the instruction of the children of the masses. They were in fact to fulfil the duties in the education of girls, which are being performed by the followers of St. Ignatius and St. Joseph Calasancius for boys and youths, and in this way to maintain and extend as far as possible the knowledge and the love and service of God.

We also find a second great truth illustrated in the life of Mother Julie. This is the law of suffering. The Spirit of God teaches us that suffering is a pledge of our being pleasing to God: "Because thou wast acceptable unto God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee;"† and St. Paul instructs his disciple Timothy, saying that, entering into the service of God, he must prepare himself for many trials, "for all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."‡ Moreover, a greater than St. Paul, our Lord Himself, proclaimed blessed all those who for His sake suffer persecution and are the victims of men's malice and evil tongues. "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and perse-

* Of all divine work, the most divine is to labour with God in the salvation of souls. (St. Dionysius.)

† Tobias xii, 13. ‡ 2 Tim. iii, 12.

cute you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly for My sake."*

Accordingly we find that the history of all those who have been distinguished for sanctity and for the promotion of God's glory in the world, is invariably marked by one characteristic—it is the history of suffering and of opposition. Like their grand Original, "they are all placed as a sign of contradiction." We may say with all truth that the law of sanctity is the law of suffering. More especially is this the case when, in addition to the labour of securing his own perfection, the person devotes himself to the sanctification of others.

How thoroughly this law was verified in the life of Venerable Julie Billiart is made clear in the following pages. We may say that her whole life was made up of sufferings, was one long martyrdom. As she advanced in years, so also did her sufferings increase in their intensity.

In early youth she was deprived of the comforts of a home: to this trial was added for two-and-twenty years another, by which she was deprived of the use of her limbs through a paralytic stroke. In addition, her life was exposed to imminent danger from the persecutors of the Catholic Church.

But of all her sufferings the greatest were those reserved for her later years, when she found that

* Matt. v, 11.

the chief opponents to the work which Our Lord had destined her to do, were the very persons from whom she might reasonably have expected the staunchest support and encouragement, who by their profession were constituted the guides and directors of souls, and whose sacred duty it was to promote whatever might conduce to the honour and glory of God or the salvation of souls. Our Blessed Lord had to suffer from the high-priest and the priests of the synagogue, and this it was that filled up the cup of His sorrow, and made it run over: so too it was the will of God that His Servant should share in this His sorrow by permitting her to suffer opposition, persecution and calumny, from those dedicated to the Sanctuary. Yet never a sign or expression of murmuring or impatience escaped her, but with unswerving courage she bravely and cheerfully accepted all for the love of our Blessed Lord. There was no betrayal of a shadow of doubt, or wavering, but an unshaken confidence in the protection of her Heavenly Spouse, "in whom she believed, whom she loved, and in whom she placed all her trust."

It was by these her sufferings that God prepared and perfected Mother Julie Billiart for the work He had assigned to her; and how perfectly she co-operated with Him and corresponded with the abundant graces which He bestowed upon her to fit her to carry out His design, is seen clearly in

the history of her life. In it we observe with what extraordinary firmness, energy and perseverance she overcame all kinds of difficulties, whenever there was question of God's glory and the salvation or perfection of souls. Her uninterrupted union with our Lord and her profound spirit of prayer developed in her singular generosity, fearlessness and magnanimity, qualities necessary in one who was to found an Institute such as hers, and who was to become the Mother of the Society of the Sisters of Notre-Dame.

In those who sought admission into her Congregation she required a serious resolve to devote themselves to a life of recollection and prayer, to give up their own wills, to cultivate detachment from all which is not in God and for Him. The true Sister of Notre-Dame was to be prepared to leave country and friends, to go to any place or country, to accept any office assigned by Superiors, if it be for God's glory and the salvation of souls; nay, she must moreover be content to be employed in any menial or domestic duties at the call of obedience or the expression of the Superior's will.

In order to keep alive this spirit of prayer and self-sacrifice, and this detachment from creatures, she prescribes daily meditation in the morning and evening, frequent visits to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and also scrupulous obser-

vance of silence and recollection, as far as is consistent with the duties of teaching or instruction.

Of course for such an exalted vocation, in which the active life is combined with the contemplative, from which it must derive its main force and efficacy, for a vocation in which to the labours of evangelizing others is added that of securing one's own sanctification, there is required in all who would aspire to embrace it, great freedom or largeness of soul, a manly and courageous disposition (*cor magnum et anima volens*,) a steady, firm and uncompromising character. These qualities the reader will find in an eminent degree in Mother Julie Billiart, or, as she called herself, Sister Ignatius, and through the grace and special blessing of our dear Lord, she has handed them down to those who glory in the great privilege of being members of her Society. And if we may judge the spirit of the Mother by that of those whom, under God, she claims as her children, if their virtues and labours redound to the honour and glory of her whom they call their Mother, what must have been her spirit, and who can say the height of her honour and the greatness of her glory in the sight of our good and generous Father in heaven? Within the short space of time during which this Society has been established, we find that it has multiplied its foundations in Belgium, in England, and especially in America.

Further, we also find that it has opened two houses in the Congo State of South Africa; that in Belgium it counts above 1,300 members, in America above 1,150, and in England between 500 and 600; that from one establishment alone the Sisters have trained and sent forth apostles of education in the shape of lay mistresses to the number of 2,000, who are employed in all parts of Great Britain in teaching the rising generation.*

Well then may we apply to Mother Julie those words with which the citizens of Bethulia greeted the heroine Judith on her return from the destruction of her country's foes: "*Tu gloria Jerusalem, tu lætitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri.*"†

Surely it is a glory for the true Jerusalem, the Holy Catholic Church, that she can point to her as one who in her own person, as also in her children, has done such glorious deeds for the promotion of the knowledge and love and glory of our God against His and our enemies. Truly she is the "lætitia Israel" in giving true joy to the souls of all those whom she has been the means of preserving from the pollution of sin, and

* Since this was written two English foundations have been added to the African Mission;—one at Empandeni (Zambesi), the other at Kroonstadt (Orange River Free State). At the present time (March, 1909), the number of Sisters in America reaches 1,489, in England and Scotland 652, and in Africa 33, while 2,690 trained schoolmistresses have gone forth from the Liverpool Training College.

† *Judith* xv, 10.

inspiring with a love of Him who is the only source of true joy. She is "*honorificentia populi nostri*," the honour of all those who are of the household of the Faith, for her spirit survives in those hundreds of virgins, who, following in her footsteps, are zealously carrying on the work which she so nobly began.

In conclusion, the author acknowledges her great indebtedness to the Rev. Père Clair, whose admirable Life of Julie Billiart has been of much service in the production of the following pages, and from which some chapters have been borrowed and translated.

JAMES CLARE, S.J.

St Beuno's, October, 1897.

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BIRTHPLACE OF BLESSED JULIE BILLIART AT CUCULLY

(The x marks the room so long occupied by Julie)

THE BLESSED JULIE BILLIART

CHAPTER I

Childhood

IN a valley of the department of Oise, a few miles only from the historic town of Compiègne, and in a province steeped in the memories of the Hundred Years' War, lies the village of Cuvilly. Here was born, and here lived for more than thirty years, the Blessed Julie Billiart, Foundress of the Institute of the "Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Namur."

The plain on which the village stands is traversed by the high road to Flanders; it is bounded on the north by the wooded slopes of Séchelles, and on the south by the ridge of hills rising above the valley of St-Maur. One of the later Lords of Séchelles perished on the scaffold during the French Revolution; a daughter of the house, Mme. de Pont l'Abbé, will meet us in these pages as a friend and protectress of Julie Billiart. The landscape is peaceful and pastoral, dotted with rural hamlets, each with its church steeple and its Calvary. For every village of Picardy, as well as every spot where the roads meet, has its wayside cross, standing half hidden in the

shade of ancient trees, and often surrounded by a hedge or trellis covered with honeysuckle or traveller's-joy. In those happier days when France was still a land of faith and love, the villagers took a pride in arranging and adorning their Calvary, and placed their hearths and homes with touching Christian instinct under the protection of the Cross of Christ. Many and many a time must Julie have gazed upon that sacred emblem, many and many a time knelt and prayed before it as a child. The traveller entering the village by the Calvary is at once struck by the parish church of St-Éloi. It is of considerable size, and not a little architectural curiosity; but the pilgrim to the home of Blessed Julie finds in it another and a deeper interest. Over its font the baby Marie-Rose-Julie was held, before its altar she received the Bread of Life, and the vaulted Gothic roof keeps the pure echoes of the girl's voice singing those *cantiques* to the Sacred Heart and to the Blessed Virgin which she loved so well. In the Rue de Lataule a house is pointed out as that once occupied by the Billiard family. A gate in the low wall leads into a courtyard, which is bounded on the right by a long, low building with a thatched roof, while opposite the gate a little straw-covered shed separated the yard from the garden—for in Cuvilly no cottage is without its sunny garden, bright with gay flowers. Now, the thatch of the roof has been



THE CHURCH AT CUVILLY

To face p. 2

replaced by tiles; the earthen wall has been rebuilt in free-stone; the arched doorway leading into the shop has been narrowed; otherwise, the place has changed but little since the Servant of God sanctified it by her presence; and, above all, the humble room where for so many long years she prayed and suffered is still just as she left it—to us not merely a memorial of the past, but a sanctuary and a shrine.

The name of Billiard is to be found in the archives of the Commune for generations back—one member of the family figures therein as “*lieutenant de justice du dit lieu.*” They had once owned a fairly large amount of property, and considerable gifts made by them to the parish church bear witness to their generosity and piety. In the time of which we write their fortunes had somewhat declined, but the traditional virtue and honour flourished as of old, ready to be passed on as a precious heritage to her whose holiness was to make the name of the peasant of Cuvilly “live for ever and ever.”*

In 1751 the homestead of the Rue de Lataule was the abode of an industrious couple, Jean-François Billiard and Marie-Louise-Antoinette Debraine. Though they were not wealthy, their circumstances were comparatively easy, for, in addition to the produce of their small plot of land, they



* Ecclus. xlv.

derived some income from keeping a little draper's shop. Married in 1739, they had already had four daughters and one son before the birth of Julie. Two of the girls, Louise-Antoinette and Marie-Rose, died in infancy; two more children, Marie-Louise-Angélique and Jean-Baptiste, barely outlived childhood, so that in a few years there remained only Julie, a sister, Marie-Madeleine-Henriette, her elder by seven years, and a younger brother, Louis-François, born in 1754. Both the latter ultimately married, and brought up good Christian families; they are still represented by descendants at Cuvilly, Beauvais and Paris.

Blessed Julie Billiard was born on July 12, 1751. She was taken the same day to the church of St-Éloi, where with the names of Marie-Rose-Julie she received at the baptismal font that robe of grace which, we believe, she carried unspotted to the throne of God. It is characteristic of Julie's solid piety that to the last she honoured that day of her new birth with a special memory of thanksgiving. Writing in the decline of life to one of her best-beloved daughters, Sister Anastasie, she says: "You will receive my letter on the anniversary of my baptism. Surely I ought to die of shame for not having long since died of love for God, of gratitude to my good Jesus!" And she established the usage that every Sister of Notre-Dame should receive Holy Communion not only



THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH AT CUVILLY

To face p. 4

on the feast of her Patron Saint, but also on the day which had sealed her as child of God and member of His Church.

The home in which the little Julie was reared was of that patriarchal type now, unhappily, almost unknown amongst us. In its atmosphere of simple-hearted piety, of unworldliness and of clear truthfulness, the grace of her regeneration freely blossomed, and she grew rapidly "in wisdom and grace before God and man." The Holy Ghost Himself became her first teacher;* and, like a Catherine of Siena, a Teresa, a John Berchmans, the little one would often slip away from the family circle, to be found later in some corner of the cottage, her eyes cast down, her tiny palms pressed together, praying with an ardour and devotion far beyond her years.† And even at this early age she was wont to deny herself in many ways, practising in secret acts of penance and voluntary mortification.

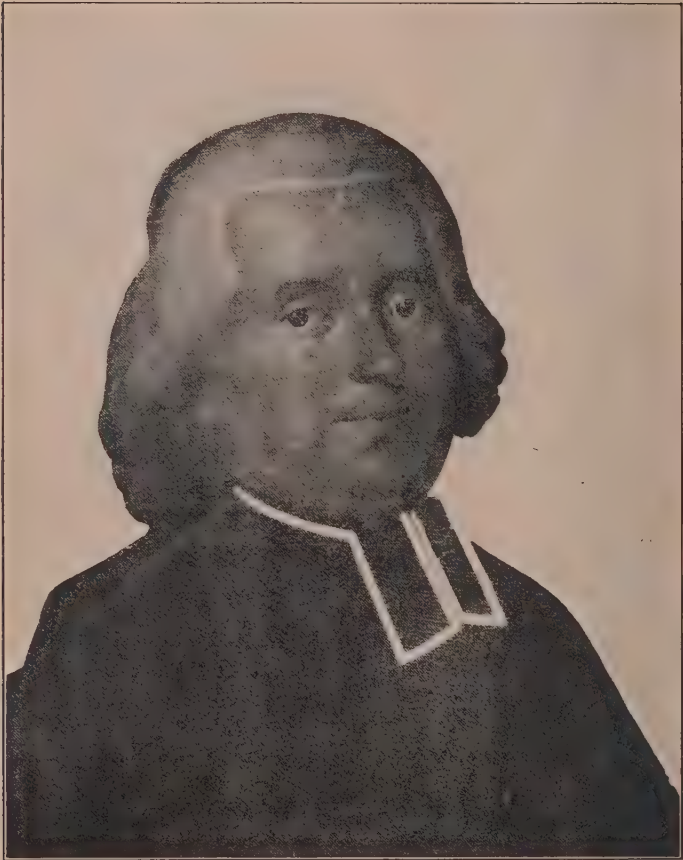
The village school was kept by her own uncle, Thibault Guilbert. She was very soon sent there, and eagerly profited by the opportunity given her of learning to read and write—little else was taught at Cuvilly. But her fine intelligence developed of itself, and in after years people used to admire in the unlettered peasant a certain lofti-

*Process of Information at Namur.

† Evidence given in 1820 by M. Trouvelot, dean of Ressons-sur-Metz, who died head priest of Saint-Jacques, Compiègne.

6 The Blessed Julie Billiart

ness of thought, and a distinction of manner and of language which sprang from the aristocracy of the heart. The child's favourite lesson was the Catechism. By the time she had reached the age of seven she knew it perfectly, and had mastered not only the words, but their meaning. Scripture History, too, fascinated her; and as time went on she gained so thorough a knowledge of it that it was to her a very fund of illustration in her teaching. No one can read the Letters and Conferences of Blessed Julie without being struck by her ready and apt use of the Sacred Text. It was a pretty sight, when school was over, to see the bright and winning little maid eagerly gather her companions round her, and, sitting in their midst, gravely explain to them the Catechism she loved so well. Even then she made willing listeners, and if any were absent she would send for them, crying out: "I want plenty of little souls, to teach them how to love and serve the good God." The lesson was wont to wind up with an exhortation on the love of God or the hatefulness of sin, so earnest, we are told, as to captivate all who heard it, whether young or old. It was the future Foundress unconsciously practising the special work of her own Institute, for, as Mère St-Joseph, her co-foundress, loved to repeat, "The Sisters of Notre-Dame exist for the teaching of the Catechism." In this employment Julie seemed supremely happy. Her



MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ DANGICOURT

From an Oil Painting in possession of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Namur.

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heart even then was that of a little apostle, already burning with that zeal for souls which consumed it all through her life. As she grew older, she kept her early love for teaching; she would assemble the neglected little ones whose parents were too poor to send them to school, and teach them the chief mysteries of our holy faith with as much of the Catechism as was necessary to prepare them for the reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. She seems, in some cases, to have added to her religious instructions lessons in reading and writing. Mère St-Joseph tells us that amongst her scholars "was a little beggar boy, whom she instructed so patiently and so well that she managed to refine away his native roughness and made him fit to take a situation. From his first place he rose to a better one, and so to a third; and at last was able to set up in business and realize a modest competency. Thirty years later I was touched to see a letter, very well composed and filled with sentiments of piety and gratitude, which he wrote to our Mother to thank her for the good fortune of which he regarded her, after God, as the chief cause."

Julie's childish efforts to win souls to that God who was secretly drawing her own heart to Himself attracted the attention of the saintly Curé of the parish. The Abbé Dangicourt, who in the designs of Divine Providence was destined to guard

and guide this privileged soul, was no less remarkable for his solid virtue than for his profound learning; he had won the esteem and confidence of the neighbouring clergy, while his own little flock loved him as a father and venerated him as a saint. He first came to Cuvilly as curate to his uncle, M. Pottier, upon whose death he took charge of the parish. Père Sellier, the Jesuit, in his notice of the Servant of God, thus speaks of her holy director: "Cuvilly had for Curé at that time an ecclesiastic of rare merit, M. Dancourt, noted for his piety, zeal and learning. Madame de Pont-l'Abbé thought so highly of the pastor of Cuvilly that she used every effort to obtain him as tutor for her son, and after many entreaties the Bishop of Beauvais acceded to her wishes. Whenever the pious châtelaine went to her country seat, she was in the habit of inviting a circle of congenial friends to enjoy his society and profit by his counsels."

Under the direction of this holy priest the simple peasantry of Cuvilly found in the practices of piety their truest happiness. After their hard day's toil they loved to collect in the fine old church, where the zealous pastor used to read the *Night Prayers of the late Monseigneur the Marshal of Bellefont*. The manuscript of these prayers, written in a large clear hand, bears the signature of the schoolmaster, Thibault Guilbert, together with

this quaint note: "The late Cardinal de Bouillon thought them so beautiful that he wished to have them to make use of in his own house. It is certain that anyone who reads them slowly will find them full of unction." After the prayers came a hymn, intoned by the *Magister*, and taken up by the whole congregation. It is doubtless from this time that we may date Julie's love for the singing of hymns—a love which she kept all through her life, and which still remains to her Institute and its pupils.

Enlightened by the spirit of God, M. Dangi-court judged from Julie's apparently infused knowledge of the truths of faith, and her singularly delicate appreciation of divine things, that God had great designs upon her soul, and he was jealous of her correspondence with them. He therefore initiated her into the method of mental prayer and the practices of a devout life. By his advice, she set herself to conquer that natural impetuosity in which her director foresaw dangers to her soul. So frequently did grace triumph over nature, that although she was often tried by the boyish freaks of her brother Louis, who took a mischievous delight in disturbing her pious solitude, no sign of ill-humour ever appeared. And if at any time it seemed to her that she had been wanting in gentleness, she at once asked pardon with touching sweetness and humility.

Seeing how visibly God was drawing His little penitent to Himself, M. Dangicourt resolved to allow her to make her First Communion when she was but nine years old—a most exceptional privilege in days when the chill spirit of Jansenism kept the children of France from the Holy Table till the uniform age of thirteen or fourteen. On all the great feasts, and sometimes oftener, in the early dawn when St-Éloi was still empty, the good priest would carry to the happy child kneeling at the altar rails the Bridegroom who feeds among the lilies, the Lover of little children. We need not wonder that from that time she advanced rapidly in the path of solid virtue. None but God knew the ardour of her young heart's love, or the generosity with which she offered herself to Him in those blessed moments when, kneeling alone and unseen in the old village church, she held within her Him whom her soul loved; but all could bear witness to the spirit of self-sacrifice which marked her daily life. From the time of leaving school her one thought seemed to be to devote herself to her parents; and, as she enjoyed the blessing of robust health, she cheerfully undertook the most laborious duties about the house and garden. But, "busy about many things" in the service of her Lord, she yet never neglected "the better part." She began the day by an hour's meditation, and always managed to give some time



THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH AT CUOILLI

to spiritual reading. Her favourite books were the Gospels, the Psalms, the Epistles of St. Paul, and *The Following of Christ*. Later on she added to these a few other works of solid piety, such as Rodriguez on *Christian Perfection*, *Les Pensées Chrétiennes* of Père Bouhours, and the writings of St. Teresa. Every day, even in seasons of the heaviest labour in the fields, she paid several visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Rather than omit the least of her exercises of piety, she shortened her sleep; it was at the foot of the altar, or in her room if the church was shut, that she found—as she herself owned—“rest, strength and courage.”

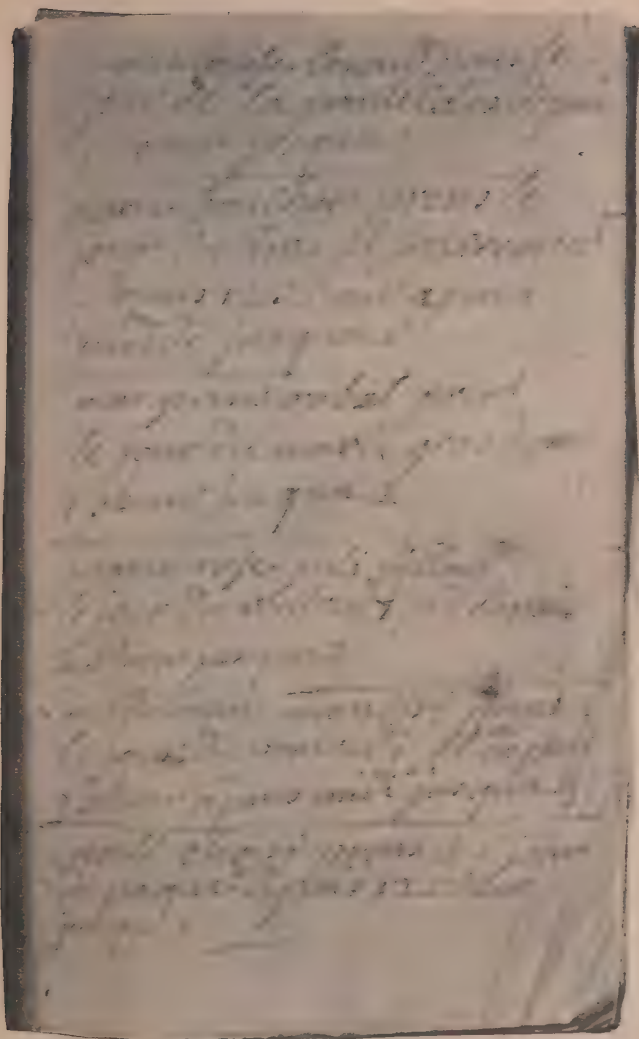
This union of action with contemplation is, of course, a commonplace in the lives of the Saints; but to us who live under that Rule of hers which requires of her daughters that they “be at one and the same time Martha and Mary,” this early steadfastness in prayer in the midst of a hard and laborious life is a thing we love to linger on. Many who praise the vigorous educational work of the Institute in our own day and land do not so much as guess at the faithful hours of prescribed prayer whence that which appears to the outward eye draws not only its vitality but its very success.

In the sacristy at Cuvilly several interesting memorials have thrown light on the special devotions of the Servant of God. The manuscript of

Night Prayers, already mentioned, contains a *résumé* of the "Rules and Practices of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, established on April 15, 1738, at the Monastery of the Visitation Sainte-Marie de Compiègne." Two lists of names follow, in the handwriting of the Abbé Dangicourt, enumerating the members of this pious Association at Cuvilly. The tenth name on the first list is that of Marie-Rose-Julie Billiard, and a little further down appear the names of her sister Marie-Madeleine, her brother Louis-François, and several other members of the family. The rules assigned to each associate an hour's watch before the Blessed Sacrament once a year. The hour chosen by Julie was from two to three o'clock on Good Friday.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart was an hereditary one with the Billiards. In the process held at Beauvais with a view to the beatification of the Servant of God, Mme. Berthelot, her grand-niece, deposed that her own mother was accustomed to repeat, "My children, it is to the Sacred Heart that I always pray. Keep up this devotion, it is a family one."

A custom instituted by their blessed Foundress gathers the Sisters of Notre-Dame every evening around the tabernacle to recite in common an Act of Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. That said every Tuesday begins with these



PAGE FROM AN PRAYER-BOOK BELONGING TO THE CONFRATERNITY OF THE SACRED HEART, CUVILLY

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BANNER WORKED BY BLESSED JULIE

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words: "O Jesus, Son of the living God, who, by an incomprehensible effect of the love of Thy Divine Heart, hast willed to hide Thyself beneath the veils of this august Sacrament," etc. Turning over the leaves of the little Cuvilly manual, we are touched to come across the self-same words. The page is worn and stained with drops of wax, telling how frequently the prayer had been said; Julie had carried it away engraven on her heart.

The sacristy of St-Éloi also gave evidence of her love for the Immaculate Mother of God. A white satin banner, said to have been embroidered by her hands, and now kept at the Mother-House at Namur, bears the monogram of our Lady, with the inscription: *Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula non est in te*. Later on we shall hear of the vow Julie made to propagate the devotion to "Mary conceived without sin." Cuvilly still preserves the tradition that when she had finished her daily devotions to our Lord in his Sacrament of Love the child never failed to kneel at the Lady Altar to ask the blessing of her heavenly Mother before going home.

In 1764 Julie received the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Cardinal Bishop of Beauvais, Mgr. Etienne-Réné Potier de Gesvres, visited Cuvilly that year for a double ceremony. On the morning of June 4 he confirmed the village children.

On a list of names discovered in an ancient antiphonary of the church we find that of "Marie-Rose-Julie Billiart, age 13." In the afternoon of the same day the Cardinal blessed with great pomp the chapel erected in honour of St. Barnabas by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem on their estate at Bellicourt. They had brought from beyond the sea relics of this Saint and other sacred treasures. One of these was an authentic relic of the true Cross, set in a large cruciform reliquary, and the esteem in which the holy child of Cuvilly was held is shown by the fact that this was presented by one of the Knights to the little Julie, labelled: "Given to Julie Billiart by a Knight of Malta." She, with characteristic generosity, deprived herself of her treasure in favour of the parish, and up to the Revolution the sacred fragment was exposed every year on the days which commemorate our Lord's Passion. The reliquary may still be seen in the Mother House of the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Namur.

About a year after her Confirmation, pressed by the charity of Christ, Julie, with the approval of her director, made a vow of perpetual chastity. From that moment her love for the Divine Spouse of Virgins grew intenser yet. She approached the Holy Table as often as possible, and at the age of twenty obtained the signal favour of daily Communion. Long years after-



RELIQUARY OF THE TRUE CROSS GIVEN TO BLESSED JULIE BY A
KNIGHT OF MALTA

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wards she owed to her first companion, Mère Blin de Bourdon, that "never in her life had she experienced so deep a joy as when her confessor allowed her daily Communion, and that her soul had then been seized with a mingled feeling of happiness and wonder which it would be impossible for her to express."* No one else marvelled that this privilege should be granted to her who was already known as "the Saint of Cuvilly."

So, in prayer, and work, and peace, the years of Julie's childhood slipped away. Like Tobias "she did no childish thing"; and to us, who look back upon them, not a few prophetic indications of her future career mark the simple tenor of these early years. Already grace is developing in that eager young heart the virtues and gifts which are specially to stamp the future Foundress—love of God, zeal for souls, power over others for good. Already she practises the active combined with the contemplative life—a life specially characteristic of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. And now her preparation for the apostolate was to be completed by sufferings and trials of all kinds: the instrument was to be reduced to a state of utter helplessness that to God alone might be attributed the glory of a work which should be manifestly only His.

* *Mémoires of Mère Blin de Bourdon.*

CHAPTER II

Julie's First Trials

IT would be a truism for the biographer of any great friend of God to state that his or her life was marked by the cross. "In the cross is the height of virtue, in the cross is the perfection of sanctity."* Nevertheless, it has always seemed to us that the life of the Blessed Julie is specially rich in this heritage of the Saints; and the unerring touch of Holy Church has singled out this characteristic as the very first of the notes struck in the triple prayers of the Mass of the Beata, whose united chord gives the very music of Julie's soul. "O God," she prays, "who hast willed that Blessed Julie should, through her undaunted love of Thy Cross, enrich Thy Church with a new family for the instruction of the daughters of the poor, grant through her intercession that by courageous endurance of sufferings we may attain to the joys of eternity." The blessed shadow fell early across her path. She was only just sixteen when the first of a series of trials came suddenly upon her. Up to that time her family had enjoyed a

* *Imit. of Christ*, II, xii.

modest competency, and had never known privation. Her father's character had won the esteem of his neighbours, and all had prospered with him. Now, one after another, came heavy losses, to which was soon added the bitterer trial of the slander of his fair name.

One night, when Jean-François Billiard and his family were asleep, thieves broke in and carried off the best part of their small stock of merchandise. In their haste they dropped some pieces of linen and lace into a disused well, but these, when found, were completely spoilt. The loss was a serious one, and bankruptcy was inevitable. To satisfy his creditors M. Billiard was forced to sell nearly all the land which formed his little patrimony, and now that his last resource was gone, he found himself face to face with poverty and want. It was then that the full strength and beauty of Julie's character showed themselves. Not only did she console her suffering parents by lavishing on them the riches of her filial love, but with a courage and devotion far beyond her years she set to work at once to provide for their support. It was harvest time, and without a moment's hesitation she went out into the fields, like another Ruth, to seek employment. There she surpassed all her companions in dexterity and industry; to those that watched her, her powers of labour seemed supernatural, as though in very

truth she drew from her frequent Communions strength of body as well as vigour of soul. Something in her bearing and manner inspired instinctive reverence ; not an unbecoming word was ever dropped, even by the most thoughtless, in her presence.

There is a beautiful consistency in Blessed Julie's character and a unity in her life which cannot fail to strike the careful reader ; its large and simple lines, early revealed, run through her entire career. To her apostolic soul the fields were verily white unto harvest ; and at midday, when the reapers rested, she would sit in their midst and teach them to sing hymns, or read aloud to them some pious book which at once instructed and interested them. And so great was the young girl's ascendancy over these rough labourers, that they wished for no other amusement when they could have Julie with her book, or her still more captivating conversation. They even petitioned her to assemble them on Sundays also ; but on that day she gave herself entirely to God and her family.

When the harvest was over, Julie undertook other toils, making many long and trying journeys, both on foot and on horseback, in order to sell off the remainder of her father's stock to the best advantage. Her efforts were sometimes rewarded with unexpected success. Upon one

occasion, when her father was bemoaning the hard necessity he was under of parting with some of his goods for the tenth part of their value, Julie, with the quiet decision of manner which characterized her, packed up the material and carried it off to Beauvais, a distance of over twenty-four miles. She had never before been in the town, and knew no one there; but trusting her steps to God, she walked into the first shop she saw open, and offered her goods for sale. Providence had sent her to an honest tradesman, who, touched with compassion, at once paid her down the full price. Thus she went on from day to day, preserving the amenity of her character amidst her daily domestic cares, the modesty of her demeanour in her intercourse with the world, the peace of her soul amidst endless temporal embarrassments, and keeping up all the devout practices of her inner life though overwhelmed with external occupations.

These incessant labours seemed too little for her vigorous spirit. She found time to visit the sick, and her much-needed rest was sacrificed night after night whenever anyone among the poor villagers was dangerously ill. Her well-known charity caused her to be chosen for many a little office of trust, and Cuvilly long preserved with veneration the embroidered purse with which she used to make the collection in the parish

church on Sundays.* Père Sellier, S.J., whose relations with Blessed Julie will be noticed later on, mentions in connexion with this period of her life a detail worth noting here. Mme. Hérault de Séchelles, to whom the manor of Cuvilly belonged, came every year to spend the summer months in her château there. She was quick to remark the virtues and superior qualities of Julie, and made her the confidante of her good works and the distributor of her alms. But this little distinction, so flattering for her, only rendered Julie more modest and retiring. She had other friends too. Her skill in church embroidery, to which we have already alluded, took her from time to time to the Carmelite Convent at Compiègne, renowned at that time through all the countryside for its strict observance and the holy lives of its inmates. Thus she formed an intimacy with that band of noble women who, a few years later, were one and all to win the martyr's palm; and the annals of her life note that their saintly conversation fanned to yet brighter flame her ardour in the service of God. Surely it was not a mere chance, but rather God's eternal seal upon that friendship, that eight days after the hand of Pius X had placed the coronet of the Blessed on the brows of the Virgin of Cuvilly, it

*This purse is now in the possession of the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Namur. It is worked with the arms of the family of Pont-l'Abbé of Gournay-sur-Aronde.

was lifted again to set it on those of the martyrs of Compiègne.

Unremitting toil and the exercises of active charity were now to be exchanged for intense suffering and complete inactivity. The scanty food, the incessant labour, the constant exposure to extremes of heat and cold, gradually told upon the girl's hitherto robust constitution. She began to suffer from violent toothache, and an ophthalmic affection soon threatened her with total blindness. To obtain the cure of her eyes the whole family went on a pilgrimage to Montreuil, where a copy of the Holy Face of Rome, sent to a Cistercian Convent by Pope Innocent IV, was held in great veneration, and was visited specially by those suffering from diseases of this nature. Julie's faith and devotion were rewarded by the complete restoration of her sight. Her elder sister Madeleine, who had been blind, if not from infancy, at least for many years, obtained a similar cure on the same spot. The Servant of God never lost the memory of this double favour, and many years after related the event to encourage one of her spiritual daughters to address herself to the Holy Face for the cure of her eyes.

But to fulfil the designs of God she had to advance further yet along the "King's Highway of the Holy Cross." In relieving and consoling her parents there was much natural and innocent

satisfaction; this she was now called upon to relinquish. One winter evening in 1774 Julie was sitting at work by her father's side, when the window near them was suddenly shattered by a large stone which fell at their feet: immediately afterwards a pistol was fired through the window at Jean Billiart. It missed its aim, but though no one was wounded all were terribly frightened, and Julie's nervous system received a shock from which she did not recover for some thirty years. Intense pains declared themselves in all her limbs, and little by little reduced her to a state of such utter weakness that she could hardly drag herself from room to room. As long, however, as any power of movement remained to her, she still gave herself to her domestic duties. Every day found her paying her accustomed visits to Jesus Christ both in His Sacramental Presence and in the person of His poor, and many a night still saw her watching by the bedside of the dying and the dead. No complaint, no passing murmur, ever escaped her lips. The Abbé Dangicourt, an almost daily witness of Julie's heroism, could not contain his admiration, and spoke of his young penitent in such glowing terms to his Bishop, Mgr. de la Rochefoucauld, that the prelate expressed a wish to see "the Saint of Cuvilly."* Julie was accordingly taken to

* Francis Joseph de la Rochefoucauld succeeded Cardinal de Gesvres in the See of Beauvais in 1772. He showed himself

the episcopal palace at Beauvais, and there questioned by the Bishop himself in the presence of several eminent ecclesiastics. All agreed that this humble peasant was already far advanced in the science of the Saints, and when she had withdrawn, his Lordship said to those around him: "That young girl seems to me to be inspired by God Himself. I shall be surprised if we do not hear more of her later."

Up to the year 1782 Julie had occasional moments of respite from the violence of her pains. But after that date she became a complete cripple, owing, it was thought, to the injudicious treatment of a country doctor, who, according to the custom of the times, bled her repeatedly and so weakened her that she could no longer stir without crutches. At the end of some months both legs were paralysed, and she betook herself to that couch of suffering from which she was not to rise for many years. Her state was further complicated by violent convulsions, and for a long while she lay between life and death. Five times did Julie receive from her confessor the Sacraments of the dying, but her crown was not to be so speedily won; her soul was to undergo a long purification in the furnace of suffering in

the father and friend of his flock, whose sufferings he tried to mitigate by every means in his power. It was this Bishop of Beauvais who, with his brother the Bishop of Saintes, perished in the massacre of *The Carmes*, September 2, 1792.

order to prepare her for the great work God had in store for her. The grief of her aged parents, whose stay and prop she had been, was not the least of Julie's sorrows; yet her soul was in peace, for the more God afflicted her, the closer did she cling to Him, and the favours with which He rewarded her fidelity far surpassed the sufferings by which He tried her patience. Every day M. Dangicourt brought her the only solace she desired, her Lord in His Sacrament of Love, and she remained for hours afterwards absorbed in prayer. "What struck me most in Mère Julie," says Père Sellier,* in writing of this period of her life, "was a quite uncommon gift of prayer, and I believe she was raised to a very high degree of contemplation. She spent in this holy exercise four or five hours every day. At such times she was to be seen perfectly rapt in God, motionless, all use of her senses suspended, and her countenance glowing with heavenly peace and sweetness. The noise made around her was powerless to distract her during these divine communications. She came to herself from this mysterious state with a visible effort, and only after some one had gently shaken her or pulled her by the arm. I am speaking of the time when she lay paralysed upon a bed of pain."

*: *Précis des vertus que j'ai remarquées dans la R. M. Julie,*
by P. Sellier, S.J.

"Constantly stretched upon this couch of suffering," relates Sister Stéphanie Warnier, quoting the testimony of contemporaries, "our Mother lived in unbroken union with God. Mère St-Joseph once asked her if those days had not seemed very long and tedious to her; but she answered that during the first eight years of her illness she had never once felt loneliness or *ennui*. If, later on, the cross bore heavily upon her, it was due rather to the intrusion of a schismatical priest at Cuvilly, which deprived her of the Sacraments. At that time, too, God withdrew from her His sensible favours and abandoned His servant to severe interior desolation."

Her own sufferings did not cause her to forget those of others; rather they seemed to feed her compassion for all who were in trouble. After the epidemic which raged at Cuvilly in 1782, she begged Mme. de Séchelles to have a hospital built in a field on the east side of the village, where there was a spring much frequented by the sick and still known as the "Fontaine-Malade."

But it was to souls that the pity of her great heart chiefly went out, and if her feet were motionless, her lips could still announce the Gospel of Peace. So the children still trooped in, and gathered round her bed to hear her explain the Catechism, and many a time grown-up persons mingled with the little ones and learned to

26 The Blessed Julie Billiard

love virtue from her irresistible teaching.* For to see Julie was to love her—all were won by the clear, frank eyes, the simple, kindly manner, and that good smile of hers which love had already sealed upon her lips, and to which suffering gave a pathetic charm. And over all these things was the indescribable bloom of her angelic modesty.

Those on whom her tenderest zeal was lavished were the children preparing for their First Communion; and so deep did her lessons sink that the fruit of them was visible in Cuvilly many long years afterwards. A Curé of the place† relates that he had met with old people to whom he had taken the Holy Viaticum, who would say to him: “Wait a bit, M. le Curé; I must first say the Acts which Julie Billiard taught me.”

Other visitors, too, pressed into the poor little room—great ladies from Paris, whom the summer brought down to their châteaux round about Cuvilly—Mme. de Pont-l’Abbé from her seat at Gournay-sur-Aronde, the pious Mme. de Séchelles, who venerated Julie both as a Saint and as the living image of Christ Crucified, and the Countess Baudoin with her three bright girls. The father of this last was the aged Count d’Arlincourt, one of the “Farmers General of the Revenue,” and often, when staying with his daughter, he would

* The Abbé Trouvelot.

† The Abbé d’Héry. Rogatory process at Beauvais.

accompany her in her visits to the Rue de La-taule. He very soon became as attached to the saintly invalid as she was herself, so much so indeed that he left her in his will a life annuity of 600 francs. The noble ladies, on their side, did what they could to remedy the inconveniences of the narrow chamber. They had the brick floor replaced by oak boards, and a door made to open on the courtyard, so that visitors need not pass through the house. They were to do more yet for God's servant before many months were out; but they dreamed nothing of this now. And Julie, content in her poverty and suffering, dreamed of nothing but catechizing the children, and making lace and linen for the altar—for the paralysis had not, as yet, touched the upper part of her body, and the skilful fingers were busy as of old.

But the hour was at hand when she was not only to teach the Faith to the children and the poor, but to confess it at the peril of her life.

CHAPTER III

Persecution

THE eight years just described—years of solitude, of daily Communion, of almost uninterrupted intercourse with heaven—seemed to have been given to the Servant of God to prepare her for new and more terrible trials. In 1789 the storm of the Revolution burst over France, and in July, 1790, the National Assembly voted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, an act virtually annulling the authority of the Catholic Church. Exile, imprisonment or death was the fate of those faithful pastors who refused to take the oath of submission to the civil power. In order to be able still to minister to his flock, the venerable Curé of Cuvilly was obliged, like so many others, to seek safety in concealment. For six months his hiding-place was a kind of dark hole behind a hen-house. From this he ventured out at night to fulfil his priestly duties, and many a time his Mass was said in the little home of Julie Billiard. But he was too well known to be able long to elude the vigilance of his enemies. Though but in charge of a poor country mission, his eloquence

had made him a name, and every year he was invited to Paris to preach at Mont-Valérien, where the celebrated Calvary attracted a crowd of pilgrims, his own parish being confided during his absence to the Canons of the collegiate church of Rollet. At Mont-Valérien, then, he took refuge, and here very shortly afterwards he died.

His place at Cuvilly was taken by one of the schismatic priests. This unhappy man tried in the beginning to pay visits to the holy invalid, but Julie, strong in her faith, refused all communication with the intruder, and so great was the ascendancy which her holiness gave her over others, that many a wavering soul was preserved from schism by her words and example. "We must pray much for him," she would say with characteristic charity, "that God may open his eyes." M. d'Héry, who is our authority for these facts, adds the following remarkable words: "Julie has left behind her the reputation of a person whose faith was her very life, and she did much to preserve it intact among the people during the troubles of the French Revolution. It is to her happy influence that, on the reopening of the churches, the faith of her part of the country is to be attributed. I have often heard of her zeal for the salvation of souls—a zeal which showed itself in her practice of explaining Christian doctrine, and in her efforts to maintain souls in the true

faith at the epoch of the constitutional schism." At the same time that she thus supported the weak, Julie helped to conceal in their midst several good priests, and managed the meetings between them and their distressed people.

This was more than enough to enrage the Republican party against her. Their threats were too significant to be mistaken, and Madame de Pont-l'Abbé, who was much attached to Julie, trembling for her safety, besought her to seek shelter in her own château of Gournay-sur-Aronde. She came herself in her carriage to fetch her dear invalid and the niece Félicité who had long been her loving attendant and nurse. But Gournay was no very secure refuge. Its noble owner with her virtues and her wealth had too many titles to the hatred of the Republicans to be left in peace. To save her life she was forced to join the stream of *émigrés*, leaving behind her the friend whose infirmities rendered flight impossible, and whose only chance was to remain at Gournay under the care of a faithful dependant of the family, who was to stay to look after the property.

Meanwhile the enemies of God and of His Church had not lost sight of their intended victim. One evening a great crowd assembled near the gates of the château, and called out fiercely for *la dévote*; they declared she had concealed some refractory priests in the house, and that un-

less she were instantly given up to them they would set the whole place on fire. Already had these misguided wretches torn down in their fury the village Calvary, and with its fragments made a pile whereon they intended to burn at one and the same time the image of their Redeemer and the frail body of His suffering disciple. The concierge hastily warned Julie of her danger. There was no means of concealment in the house, but in a lane near there was an open cart. Thither they carried Julie, laid her at the bottom of it, and covered her with straw. The mob soon forced the gates of the château, streamed into the old quadrangle and through the deserted rooms, still calling for *la dévote*. From her hiding-place Julie could hear the savage cries of her pursuers, rendered furious when they returned from their fruitless search, and their foul blasphemies caused her intolerable pain. In later years she acknowledged in confidence that she would willingly have made herself known and delivered herself up to any torment, if by so doing she could have hoped to prevent the offence against God, and she would regret that she had not been discovered and had thus lost the opportunity of giving her life for her faith. At last the mob, wearied with their own frenzy and somewhat sobered by a timely address from the indignant concierge, took their departure, and Julie's friends hastened to her rescue.

There was no question of her re-entering the château—the mob might return at any moment, and it was determined to attempt at all risks an immediate flight to Compiègne.

Félicité got into the cart with her aunt, and they were driven cautiously along, avoiding the high road and making a long round before they reached the town. Julie arrived there more dead than alive. After they had taken her from under the straw, her conductors thought that they had done enough, and, trembling for their own safety, they hurried back to Gournay. She was left alone in the courtyard of an inn, unable to move a step, knowing no one, and compelled to pass the long winter's night in the open air. It was with great difficulty that Félicité could get her to swallow a little wine. "Meanwhile," says Père Sellier, "she awaited with unalterable patience the moment when Divine Providence should come to her aid; nor was she deceived in her hope." Two kind ladies, named Chambon, took her into their house, and gave her all the care which her condition required. But she did not enjoy their hospitality for long; her name of *la dévote* had followed her, and they became with reason alarmed at the danger to which their guest's reputation for sanctity exposed them. Poor Félicité had to look out for another lodging for her charge. Five times during the three or four years of her stay at Compiègne the Servant of God had



COMPIÈGNE: THE RIVER OISE



COMPIÈGNE: PLACE JEANNE D'ARC

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to change her abode, tracked like a wild animal by the ferocious hunters of the Revolution. Her favourite aspiration at this time was this filial complaint, "Lord, wilt Thou not lodge me in Thy Paradise, since I can no longer find a shelter on earth?"

She used to say: "For the few short years of life what matters it where we are? We are sure to find some little corner to wait in. How happy should we be to resemble our good Master who had not whereon to lay His head! We are surrounded by the dying and the dead; let us then pray to die to all by universal detachment." And again, "I am in God's hands, and you know how entirely I have abandoned my future to Him. By His grace I regard myself in this world as some poor exile, far from her native land, and whose one desire is to go home as soon as it shall be the will of the good God."

Julie's position during these years was peculiarly trying. The privations which her poverty imposed upon her, the continual state of alarm in which she lived, the shocks of every kind which she had undergone, caused a great increase in her infirmities. Her nervous system was weakened, her jaws contracted in such a way that she became incapable of uttering a single word without the most violent efforts. She was soon reduced to the necessity of explaining herself by signs. In

June, 1792, the news reached her of the death of her father, whose end was edifying as his life had been. To add to her grief it was impossible for her to go to Cuvilly to console her mother. But these trials were nothing compared with the long privation of all spiritual help. Accustomed from her childhood to frequent confession and daily Communion, Julie pined away far from the Divine Consoler, who to purify still further her strong and generous soul now withdrew from her all sensible consolation, all the sweetness she had enjoyed in prayer, allowing her to suffer that interior anguish of which all the saints have tasted the bitterness. But the brave heart never flinched. Already Julie murmured to herself those words which she afterwards repeated so often to her spiritual daughters: "How good is the good God who tries us! Let us live for Him, let us die for Him! If we live by crosses, we shall die of love."*

At last sunshine succeeded the storm. God, who seemed to have forgotten His servant, did not allow her to be tried beyond her strength. His messenger of consolation was the Abbé de Lamarche. "He was," says Mgr. Baunard in his *Life of the Blessed Sophie Barat*, "a type of the old French clergy, as distinguished for his learning as he was for his personal character and his virtue. A remarkable man in the best sense of the

* "Si nous vivons de croix, nous mourrons d'amour."

term, he had that intuitive knowledge of spiritual things which may be called the genius of sanctity. He was commonly believed to be gifted with supernatural light for the guidance of souls, and there was about him such an air of holiness that all who knew him venerated him as in very truth a man of God. He had been hotly pursued during the Reign of Terror, and was himself quite unable to explain how he had escaped the scaffold."

M. de Lamarche can best tell us himself his relations with Julie. "It was not till 1793," he wrote, "that I made the acquaintance of Mère Julie. She had left Cuvilly, her native place, and been taken to Compiègne for greater safety in the troubles which at that time agitated France. I was then ministering to the spiritual needs of some faithful souls who dwelt there, notably the Carmelite nuns. Mère Julie was living in retirement in a small room with one of her nieces who took care of her. I went to visit her; she did not speak, or rather she only spoke by signs. When she went to confession, I had to give her an hour's notice. She then prepared herself with intense fervour, and obtained, as she herself owned to me, the grace of articulating distinctly. It was only after absolution that she fell back into speechlessness. It seemed clear to me that it was by no effort of nature that she was able to express herself in confession, but that she obtained this favour

by her lively faith. I saw her from time to time for about a year; I was more and more astonished at her progress in perfection. She offered herself continually to God as a victim to appease His anger. Her resignation was perfect; always calm, always united to God, her prayer was, so to speak, unceasing." We find this gift of prayer, which dates from her earliest years, alluded to by all who have left us any details of her interior life.

It was in one of these moments of close union with God that He who makes choice of the weakest instruments for His greatest works manifested His will to His humble servant. Julie was one day ravished in ecstasy and saw presented before the eyes of her soul the hill of Calvary. Surrounding our crucified Lord she beheld a multitude of virgins wearing a religious habit she had never seen before. The vision was so clear, the features of some of the religious so deeply imprinted on her memory, that many years after she was able to say to some of those who offered themselves to be her companions, "God wills that you should enter our Society; I saw you among ours at Compiègne." Thus she spoke to Françoise Blin de Bourdon to console her in her trials; thus to Marie Blondel to strengthen her in her vocation. When the time came for her to choose a religious dress for her Sisters, without a moment's hesitation she gave orders as to the shape and material

to be used; her tone was very calm and recollected as she said, "It was shown to me at Compiègne." At the close of the heavenly vision Julie heard these words, which explained to her what she had seen: "Behold the spiritual daughters whom I give to you in the Institute which will be marked by My Cross," and at that moment there was unrolled before the eyes of her soul the long series of the persecutions of her life.

The Servant of God was excessively reserved with regard to supernatural favours of this sort; but one day at Jumet speaking to the Superior, Sister Anastasie Leleu, of the contradictions in which she was then plunged at Amiens, she said:—"My daughter I knew it all—the good God had shown me everything, as He also showed me that Mère Blin would be the salvation and the support of the Institute."

Meanwhile the Reign of Terror began, and the worst excesses of the Revolution were perpetrated. Compiègne itself was the scene of the most odious excesses. The great Abbey of Saint-Corneille was sacked and pillaged; the statues of its benefactors, the Kings of France, were publicly insulted and burnt on the market-place; its magnificent art-treasures and its priceless relics destroyed or carried off. Among these last perished the celebrated Holy Winding Sheet, the gift to the abbey of its founder, Charles the Bald, and

for centuries the object of the veneration of the faithful. In July, 1793, came the martyrdom of those dear Carmelites whom she loved to call her true Mothers. They had been taken to Paris to await their fate in the Conciergerie, and the faithful Abbé de Lamarche had followed them in disguise. The whole community of sixteen religious, with their Prioress at their head, were led together to the guillotine. As they left the doors of the Conciergerie, they began to chant the *Salve Regina*, and continued singing as they went along the streets; and the strain never ceased till the head of the last of their number had fallen under the axe. The Mother Prioress, like the mother of the Machabees, saw all her community one after another fall in death, and when her own turn came, she mounted the scaffold with unfaltering step and laid her head upon the block. The good Abbé de Lamarche was with them to the last. Standing, in his disguise, at the foot of the scaffold he gave to each daughter of St. Teresa as she ascended the fatal steps the last blessing, thus completing his faithful service as chaplain to the Carmelites at Compiègne.* Their heroic death left an impression on the mind of Julie which time was unable to efface. Long years afterwards in her spiritual conferences it was her delight to place before

* M. de Lamarche spent the latter part of his life at Clermont, and died at Beauvais in 1827.



AMIENS; BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE CATHEDRAL AND CITY

her daughters the example of these Martyrs of the Revolution.

But the cup of Julie's afflictions was filled to the brim when in 1794 she learned the tragic fate of the Counts d'Arlincourt and Baudoin, the father and the husband of one of the staunchest of her noble friends. The Count d'Arlincourt, in spite of his eighty-four years and his charity to the poor, was amongst the "Farmers-General" who perished in the hecatomb of which Lavoisier was also a victim. His son-in-law, the Count Baudoin, followed him to the guillotine.

The darkest hour was just before the dawn in the case of Julie Billiard as in that of so many others. She had scarcely recovered from these successive shocks when she received a letter from the Countess Baudoin—her *bonne dame* as she used to call her—begging Julie to go to her. She herself had reached Amiens in safety with her three daughters; had taken a *quartier* in the house of a noble family; had hired a little set of rooms for Julie and her niece, and she begged her to go and occupy them without delay. In her infirm and suffering condition it seemed to Julie that the removal could hardly be accomplished without a miracle; moreover she felt within herself the strongest possible repugnance to set her face towards the city which was to be for her the scene of the persecution she had beheld in vision.

But after a long interior struggle she seemed to see in the reiterated entreaties of her friend an indication of the will of God, and she agreed. A comfortable carriage was at once sent to Compiègne, and Julie set out accompanied by Félicité. They reached Amiens in safety, October, 1794. As she passed through Cuvilly, she saw her mother for the last time.

At the corner formed by the Rue des Augustins with the Rue du Soleil there still stands the large house which was once the town residence of the Viscounts Blin de Bourdon, and in it may yet be seen the room so long sanctified by Julie's presence and the little oratory opening out of it, where Mass was so often said throughout those mournful and memorable days. Here for the first time were to meet the humble peasant and the noble lady whom God had destined to be fellow labourers in the work to which He called them. Before relating how the two foundresses came to know each other, we must go back a few years to learn something of the early life of Françoise Blin, Viscountess de Bourdon.

CHAPTER IV

Françoise Blin de Bourdon

GÉZAINCOURT, the birthplace and early home of Françoise Blin de Bourdon, is situated towards the north-east of Picardy, near the town of Doullens. The scene of our story is now no longer the sunny, treeless plain of the centre of the province, but a landscape of varied beauty, whose woods are the outskirts of the vast forest of the Ardennes. It is one of those *campagnes ignorées* where deep winding lanes, branching off from the high road on either side, take the traveller to green meadows, plaintive brooks, clumps of ash and alder—a whole world of fields, and trees, and sky, and happy rural life. The village and its castle are nearly hidden in a wooded valley through which the Authie, hardly more than a rivulet, steals its way between banks thick with rushes and yellow iris. The old manorial dwelling has been replaced by a modern edifice, but a picture at the Mother House, Namur, shows us the Château de Gézaincourt just as it was when Mlle. de Bourdon inhabited it.

At the time of which we write its owner was

the Baron de Fouquesolles, into whose family the estate came in 1698. One of his daughters married the Viscount Blin de Bourdon. The parents of Françoise, therefore, were Pierre-Louis de Blin, Viscount of Domart-en-Ponthieu, and Marie-Louise-Claudine, daughter of the Baron de Fouquesolles, Viscount of Doullens. She was their third and youngest child, born at Gézaincourt on March 8, 1756. The following day, the feast of St. Frances of Rome, she received in baptism the names of Marie-Louise-Françoise. Her grandmother held her at the baptismal font, and soon became so attached to the child that she could not bear to part with her. Accordingly it was agreed that she should be brought up by Madame de Fouquesolles, and the estate of Gézaincourt was settled upon her there and then. For this reason, up to the time of the French Revolution, Françoise Blin de Bourdon was always addressed as "Mlle. de Gézaincourt."

Every tradition which has come down to us of the childhood of Françoise points to the admirable training she received and the special graces that surrounded her in that truly Christian home. Her grandmother was not only the benevolent châtelaine, loved as a mother by all her dependents, but she was also the "valiant woman," the type of a Christian gentlewoman of the olden days of France. She had received her little god-daughter



THE CHATEAU DE GEZAINCOURT

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as a tender plant to be reared up for heaven, and her training was as firm as it was wise. Françoise was not more than four or five years old when she gave tokens of the impressions produced thus early on her childish mind. Her grandmother had given her a pair of shoes ornamented with the large rosettes of the period, and the child spoilt them by running near the lake in the Park. When Mlle. Ursule, the governess, was lamenting over the fallen splendour of the rosettes, and reproving the little girl, Françoise answered: "It is no sin to spoil rosettes, so why should you care about it?" Another day she was stung by a wasp and screamed aloud with the pain, whereupon Mlle. Ursule told her that she had much better be quiet and suffer the pain for her sins. "I have not committed any sins yet," was the quick reply, "but," drying her tears, "I will stop crying for the love of Jesus."

The character of Françoise was a strong one, and it needed all the intelligent firmness of her watchful guide to subdue, without injuring or embittering, that rich and ardent nature. Several characteristic traits are related of the child's determined will. Her grandmother found her one day disobeying her governess, and as a punishment told her to go to the top of the stairs and remain on the landing till sent for. "If I go there, I shall scream so loud that you will not leave

me." She knew the Baroness's objection to a noise. "Go all the same." Françoise went up a few steps and began screaming. "Go up to the top," was the only reply, "and stand on the landing as you were told." The child walked up repeating, "I shall not stay, I shall make too much noise." When she got to the landing, she set up shrieking at the top of her voice, till the poor Baroness, terrified lest she should hurt her chest, sent the governess to bring her down. Françoise triumphantly exclaimed, "I told you I would scream." Mme. de Fouquesolles knew how to touch the child's better nature. She called her to her side and spoke to her gently and seriously of the Holy Child of Nazareth, how He obeyed and how sad He was when children were naughty. The tears soon stood in the little one's eyes. "Don't be vexed, grandmamma, I will not make the little Jesus sad. I am going back to the landing." She then returned to the stairs without another word, and stood for half an hour, "to make up," she said, "for displeasing the little Jesus." Another day she was taken to see the Carmelite nuns. The sisters at the "turn" amused themselves by putting her in it. She stamped her little foot and said, "The good God is not pleased when nuns tease little children. Grandmamma gives me a penance when I am naughty, and I will give you one, to take me into the convent and play with me for three days."

Françoise had been told not to walk on a certain terrace in the Park, and she was bent on going to the forbidden spot, probably because it was forbidden. She went, and was immediately sent for by her grandmother to be punished. No sooner was the punishment over than the culprit returned to the terrace, exclaiming, "I like to go, and I shall go again because I like." Six times did the patient grandmother repeat the penance, and at last the wilful child gave in. She was conquered once and for ever, and the story was one she was wont to tell her spiritual daughters in her old age, to show, she said, what bad dispositions she had when she was young.

She was but six years old when she made her first confession, and was much surprised at having only two *Paters* for her penance. Her grandmother, she said, would have given her a great deal more. Mlle. Ursule explained that the Precious Blood applied in the Sacrament satisfied abundantly for her sins. "Then let me go again," she answered, "only what can one say the second time? Do people offend the good God again when He has once pardoned them?" It is recorded, in fact, that from this time her attendants never had to reprove her for any obstinate act of disobedience.

The little Viscountess was always well managed by her grandmother, but the numerous relations

and friends who came to stay at Gézaincourt in the summer were not equally judicious. Their admiration of the child's beauty, grace and wit, and their praises and caresses might easily have turned the little girl's head. Madame de Fouquesolles prudently resolved to send her away to a convent school, and she confided her treasure to the Benedictine nuns of the Abbey of St. Michael at Doullens. Each winter, however, when the château was deserted by its visitors, she sent for Françoise, and kept her with her till the return of spring, when she took her back regularly to the convent. It was there that Mlle. de Gézaincourt made her first Communion, and she often spoke in later years of the grace it had been to her to be prepared for that supreme act in a religious house. Soon after this she was sent to finish her education under the Ursulines at Amiens.

When she was nineteen, Mlle. de Gézaincourt was claimed by her parents, and lived some years with them at Bourdon and at Amiens. She made her début in society and was introduced into the highest circles of Paris. She was presented at court—the court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette—and was particularly noticed by the king's sister, the saintly Mme. Elizabeth. The world was at her feet with all that was most alluring and fascinating.

The young girl was dazzled, but it was for a very short time. We have not many details of this period of her life—we only know that she refused several brilliant offers of marriage, giving her family the impression that she was cherishing a religious vocation. Her own notes furnish this short entry: "1783. Imperfect light, half conversion." Just at this time a serious accident happened to her mother; the Viscountess fell from her carriage, a lingering illness supervened, and Françoise took up her place by the bedside of her suffering parent for ten long months. On April 2, 1784, surrounded by her husband and children, the good Viscountess peacefully gave up her soul to God.

Only five weeks previously, at Gézaincourt, the tomb had closed over the mortal remains of the Baron de Fouquesolles, and his widow, crushed by the double blow which deprived her nearly at the same time of her husband and her only child, begged that her granddaughter might return to her. M. de Bourdon was not alone. His eldest girl, Marie-Aimée, had married, but he had with him his son and daughter-in-law with their little boy. So Mlle. Françoise returned to her old home in the early spring of 1784. She was no longer the bright girl who had left it so light of heart seven years before, but the earnest, thoughtful woman who had deliberately chosen her path

and had devoted her life to the service of God and of His poor. The dawn of her conversion, as she called it, had turned into day, and we find in her notes of this time, "Conversion entire, unchangeable resolution to avoid everything which might lead me away from my end." Her duties alone detained her in that world which never possessed her heart. Her path was clear before her; she had two special claims on her time, her grandmother, now over seventy, and in failing health, and the tenants of the estate. She took up again the occupation which had been dear to her in her girlhood, and for ten years lived a life of uninterrupted usefulness, which is still spoken of at Gézaincourt. The details recorded here are many of them taken from the account of a venerable octogenarian, Flore Delhomel, seen and conversed with by a traveller who visited the spot in 1879. "La bonne demoiselle," as all Gézaincourt called her, was an example to every one by her piety and fervour. Her frequent communions were particularly remarked in a district of Picardy which still retained traces of the influence of Jansenism. She spent a considerable portion of each day in prayer, and on Sundays scarcely left the church. It was her delight to act as sacristan; she dressed the altar, prepared the vestments and contributed both by her taste and liberality to the beauty of God's house. The feast



FRANÇOISE, VICOMTESSE BLIN DE BOURDON

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of her special devotion was the "Fête-Dieu," or Corpus Christi, and she organized the procession of that day with minute and loving care. All the altars on the road taken by the Most Holy were richly adorned by her hands, and the *reposoir* at the château was entirely her own work.

Next to her religious duties was the care of the poor. Accompanied by the faithful Ursule, she visited the sick, herself preparing their remedies and dressing their wounds. Flore Delhomel, who, though in her ninetieth year, seemed to recollect everything as if it had happened yesterday, declared that the "bonne demoiselle" had special skill in curing burns and scalds. When she herself was in her infancy, she had her arm very badly scalded, and her mother took her at once to the castle. Mlle. de Gézaincourt kept the little one with her in order to attend to her constantly and gave her back to her mother quite cured. Such was her reputation for domestic surgery that people came to her from all the country round, and went away blessing the gentle hand that dispensed their remedies so skilfully, and dressed their sores so tenderly. Flore spoke of a well-remembered press, where she kept her medicines and ointments, many of which she made up herself. There was a little sheltered parterre near the house which went by the name of "Mademoiselle's garden." She had her own set of tools, and was

often found by those who came to her for advice with her trowel in hand. Mademoiselle's garden was gay with the fragrant blossoms she gathered to adorn the chapel and to brighten her grandmother's sitting-room, roses and carnations and lavender and mignonette, but one side of it was set apart for medicinal herbs—basil and sweet marjoram, mallow and coltsfoot, yarrow and feverfew—which the same delicate fingers prepared for her sick poor.

It must not be supposed, however, that Françoise saw no more of the outer world than the peasantry on her own estate. The summer brought her father, her brother and sister with their children, and there was still an annual succession of visitors from Paris and from Amiens, while the neighbouring families often had social gatherings at the château, one feature of which was a noted bowling green, which it was fashionable to frequent for games of tennis. At these re-unions Mlle. de Gézaincourt bore her part with simple dignity. But if she was present at amusements it was only for the sake of others, and whenever she could do so without being noticed, she stole away to her oratory or to her poor.

It may be asked if the pilgrim who visited Gézaincourt in 1879 saw any vestiges of the gracious life led there a century ago. Alas! very few traces remain. The ancestral towers of the de Fouque-

solles have disappeared to make way for a modern edifice; the oratory where Françoise knelt and prayed has been replaced by a Gothic chapel, built by one of the Blin de Bourdon family; the park has undergone many alterations; "Mademoiselle's garden" has gone; but the lake is still to be seen beside which she played as a child, the swelling hills are there, and the old woods, and the river lapsing in sunlight and in starlight. There are some things that never change!

In the daily round of her duties Mlle. de Gézaincourt took little heed of the stormy events that began to rage around her. The steps by which the Revolution worked itself out to its bitter end need not be related here. In 1793 the sanguinary tragedy was at its height, and the terrified *noblesse* were abandoning their country to its ruthless destroyers.

It was a cold dark night in January, 1794, when the usually silent valley resounded with tumultuous cries; the castle was threatened, but the attack was warded off by the devoted peasantry. The Curé, warned of the impending danger, gave his first thought to the safety of the Blessed Sacrament. He carried the ciborium to the château and confided the precious deposit to the care of Mlle. de Gézaincourt. No one but Françoise and her grandmother knew the sacred spot where their Lord deigned to hide from His pursuers. The

faithful priest fled into the woods, and the guardians of the Blessed Sacrament trusted themselves to It. A few evenings later, Françoise was in prayer at the feet of the Hidden God when the tumult was renewed, this time close to the castle walls. She opened a window softly and caught the words, "The Republicans are upon us, arm at once!" One of the servants hurried to meet her, saying that the "Agents of the Nation" were below, asking for the Baroness. Mlle. de Gézaincourt turned to dart one look, and with it a fervent prayer, towards the secret tabernacle, then calmly descended to encounter the gendarmes. Struck by her quiet dignity, they muttered with some hesitation that they bore an order to arrest the Baroness de Fouquesolles and herself. While the furious horde who had accompanied them pillaged the castle, Françoise pleaded for her aged relative. Nor did she plead alone. The villagers who had rushed to the rescue with the first weapons they could seize, declared that as long as there was a drop of blood in their veins their "mothers" should not be taken from them. The "Agents of the Nation" were forced to pause. They consulted together and then made a proposal to Mlle. de Gézaincourt. If the "Citoyenne Blin" would go with them, they would leave Mme. de Fouquesolles alone, but the peasants must be disarmed and she must hide her departure from them. These hard conditions were accepted. Fran-

çoise advanced towards her loyal dependents, thanked them and assured them that their benefactress should not be taken from them. They would oblige her now by retiring, as all had been peaceably arranged. After the poor villagers had taken a reluctant leave, the gendarmes waited till all was quiet, and, at one o'clock in the morning, gave the order to start. Françoise was carried off in an open cart drawn by two plough horses. A faithful man-servant followed at some distance, in spite of the threats of the gendarmes. The captive ventured to ask whither they were taking her: the only answer was that she was "under the protection of the nation." For a few moments, she afterwards related, the full horror of her situation presented itself to her mind—a violent death was before her, and she felt all the revolt of nature and all the bitterness of a real agony. But this was immediately succeeded by a feeling of trust in God. She put herself in His hands whether for life or death, and offered herself and her family, the other members of which she justly supposed to be in the same critical position, to the good pleasure of God. When her sacrifice was made, a feeling of profound peace took possession of her soul, and the rest of the journey seemed to her no more than an ordinary drive.

Early next morning the party arrived at the gates of Amiens and proceeded at once to a large

building used as a house of detention for prisoners, in the Rue de la Marine. On entering "La Providence," Françoise learned that her whole family had been arrested, and that her father and her brother with his wife and child were all prisoners. Her entreaties to see them were harshly silenced, and she was thrown into a wretched garret, where the miserable captives were huddled together without distinction of rank or age. Every day the cruel jailer roughly announced to the prisoners the execution of some of their nearest and dearest relatives. No one knew whose turn was to come next. Throughout those terrible days Françoise acted as an angel of consolation. She prayed and wept with the mourners, she poured into their hearts the balm of Christian resignation. She tended the sick, and divided amongst them the little delicacies which an old servant of the family sometimes contrived to bring to her. Some of these unhappy creatures were actually perishing from starvation, fearing to take the food provided by the jailers, lest it should be poisoned. She herself never complained of any suffering or privation. She owned later on that the physical discomforts of the place made little impression on her, and that her chief trouble had been the distraction and confusion of all around her, disturbing the peace of her soul and interfering with her habit of recollection in God.

But a great sorrow was in store for her. On

March 18 she received a letter informing her of her grandmother's death. Madame de Fouquesolles had not been told of her grandchild's arrest at the time, but she asked for her continually, and at last the sad truth was revealed. When the extent of her misery was realized, the Baroness's reason gave way. She refused all nourishment; and whenever anyone tried to persuade her to eat, her answer showed that her thoughts were with the beloved child of years ago: "No, no; I shall wait for *la petite*." *La petite* never came; her aged relative gradually sank, and went finally to await in heaven the grandchild whom she had expected so vainly upon earth.

On account of the crowded state of La Providence notice was given that any of the prisoners who wished it might be removed to Les Carmélites. No one but Mlle. de Gézaincourt asked to make the exchange. "Would you like to know," she used to say in relating the story to her Sisters in after years, "how many accepted the offer? Your humble servant, and no one else." She was led to her new prison through the streets of Amiens between two gendarmes with drawn swords. From this time forward the captivity of Françoise was like a continual spiritual retreat. The hardships of her daily life were forgotten in the congenial intercourse she enjoyed with the fervent daughters of St. Teresa, and the hours

were divided between prayer and holy conversation. For seven long months did she renew each day the sacrifice of her life, when suddenly came the news of Robespierre's advance towards Amiens. A long list of victims was prepared for the occasion, and at the head stood the names of all the Blin de Bourdon family. Françoise read her own name, with those of her father and brother, in a national journal. We find in her notes: "Accustomed though I was to look death in the face, this certainty of my impending execution, together with the thought of my father and brother, whom I should see only on the scaffold, caused me for a time an agony of pain. The bitterness of death passed over me, but it was soon at an end. The mercy of my God delivered my soul from this anguish, and with the aid of His supporting grace I regained, after a few moments, my usual serenity—only my prayers were longer and more earnest for help in the last awful moment."

She was heard in a way she had little expected. Robespierre, instead of setting out for Amiens, had fallen in his turn, and the Reign of Terror was at an end. By degrees persecution ceased, and the prison doors were opened. On August 3, 1794, the young Alexandre de Bourdon, Françoise's nephew, came to Les Carmélites. He and his parents were already free, and he brought to

his aunt the joyful news that she was restored to liberty. They were all waiting for her, he said, at the Hôtel Blin. It was late in the evening, and the calm, patient aunt answered with that look of quiet resignation which the seven months' waiting for death had imprinted on her features: "Tomorrow, my boy, I shall be with your father. I have said my night prayers, and I shall stay in my prison till morning." How were the intervening hours spent by Françoise? In pouring out her soul in prayers of thanksgiving for the marvellous deliverance vouchsafed to herself and her family. The next day she was in the arms of her father, and in that joy of reunion she forgot all the sorrows that had preceded it. After the first outpourings of joy and tenderness Viscount Blin set out for his château at Bourdon, but Françoise remained for a year at Amiens in the family mansion of her brother. Here it was that the Countess Baudoin introduced her to Julie Billiard.

And thus met the threads of those two lives, outwardly so different, inwardly so like—lives kept pure in childhood by the sweet love of Christ, made strong in maturer years by His Cross. He whose hand held the warp and the woof was about to weave them indissolubly together.

CHAPTER V
The Hôtel Blin

HOW many beautiful meetings have been recorded in the history of the saints! St. Dominic and St. Francis, St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross—souls thrown across each other's paths, apparently by chance, but to those who read aright the workings of God's providence, brought together by His hand for the fulfilment of His eternal designs. The biographer of Julie Billiard loves to linger over that meeting between the two foundresses at the Hôtel Blin in the October of 1794.

Françoise was now about thirty-eight years old, and her thoughtful countenance bore the impress of that deep peace which comes of long suffering endured for God. Julie was at once irresistibly and supernaturally drawn to her. But to the Viscountess herself, visits to an invalid whose obstructed speech rendered conversation almost impossible did not at first promise much attraction; and after the death of the Servant of God she many a time confessed that in the beginning

she had even to fight against a certain repugnance with which the poor sufferer inspired her. But it was not for long. By degrees, as she tells us in her memoirs, she began to love her visits to the little room, where Julie sometimes passed whole days in solitude; for Félicité was obliged to go out to make the necessary purchases and to sell her work. She read to her, prayed with her, watched her unalterable patience and resignation, and daily learned more of her beautiful soul, her burning love for God and her wonderful prayer. The sojourn of Françoise among the Carmelites had inspired her with a wish to become a daughter of St. Teresa, and she now placed herself under the guidance of Julie, in order to learn from her how to advance in the exercises of the contemplative life.

It was not long before the circle at the Hôtel Blin was completed by the arrival of the holy and learned Père Thomas, afterwards one of the Fathers of the Faith* and eventually a Jesuit. The Abbé Antoine Thomas was a doctor of the Sorbonne, and an old acquaintance of Mme. Baudoin. Arrested during the Terror and imprisoned at Arras, he was already on the list for execution

*This association, first known as the Society of the Sacred Heart, was formed in Belgium by certain young ecclesiastics, at whose head was the Abbé de Tournély. Their design was to keep alive, under another name, the rule and spirit of the Society of Jesus. The greater number of the Fathers joined the latter Order on its re-establishment.

when a dangerous illness caused his sentence to be deferred. In the interval came the fall of Robespierre and the consequent escape of many of the condemned. The Abbé Thomas fled to Amiens, and was soon found out by Mme. Baudoin and introduced to the Viscount de Bourdon. His liberty, however, was still in danger, for, though the Terror was over, priests were pursued with unrelenting activity. "The greatest precaution was necessary, and the good Abbé was obliged to conceal his name, his priestly character, and often his person."* Having accepted the hospitality of the Viscount, he now secretly acted as chaplain to the little band of chosen souls in the Hôtel Blin. An altar was soon arranged in the room of Julie; here the Abbé offered the holy Sacrifice and gave daily communion to the invalid. The altar was taken down for precaution's sake immediately after Mass.

Françoise de Bourdon and Mme. Baudoin were not the only visitors to the sick room. Lise Baudoin, a bright, eager girl of about eighteen, had formed a warm attachment for her mother's friend. With her came four of her companions, girls of her own age and rank—Josephine and Gabrielle Doria, Jeanne and Aglaé du Fos de Méry. They were all intimate friends of Mlle. Blin, whose piety and good works they shared,

* *Memoirs of Mère Blin de Bourdon.*



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and like her they placed themselves under the direction of Père Thomas. Young, ardent and enthusiastic, with their girlish aspirations chastened and subdued by the troubles of the times, their hearts seem to have gone out to Julie with childlike affection. Holiness acts like a magnet, and it is certainly a striking witness to Julie's power over souls that these high-born girls should all have put themselves under her spiritual guidance. By her bedside they prayed and meditated together, recited the Divine Office, silenced in so many monasteries by the Revolution, and worked for the Church and for the poor. They had chosen as patroness and model her whose sweet name was to be that of the Institute which the little family prefigured. We find in Mère Blin de Bourdon's notes an act of consecration to our Lady in her own handwriting, dated March 25, 1795, the feast of the Annunciation; another to St. Joseph, April 19,* and finally one to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, July 2, the feast of the Visitation, of the same year. This last, signed like the preceding ones, "Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin," is the act attributed by some writers to Blessed Margaret Mary herself: "I give and consecrate to the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ my person and

*In 1795 in the diocese of Amiens the feast of St. Joseph was transferred to April 19, March 19 occurring in Holy Week.

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my life, my actions, pains and sufferings.”* There is another act of consecration to the Sacred Heart, in the handwriting of Mère Julie, which is preserved by the Institute of the Sisters of Notre-Dame with filial affection. It contains the vow to propagate the devotion to the Divine Heart of our Lord and an offering to the Sacred Heart of Mary with a vow to spread the cultus of the Immaculate Conception. The document is undated, but tradition assigns it to December 8, 1794. This act of consecration, known to the public by many thousands of leaflets, was in 1881 enriched with indulgences by Cardinal Dechamps, whose approbation fixes the date attributed to it. The recent promulgation of the Bull *Auctorem fidei*, which put an end to all controversy on the subject of devotion to the Sacred Heart, may have had something to do with this increase of generous love for the Heart of Jesus to which the Servant of God had already consecrated herself in her very childhood. Affiliated by the Abbé Thomas to the *Pious Association of those devoted to the Sacred Heart in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar*,† she wrote with her own hand, “I, M.-R.-Julie Billiard, inscribe myself with all my

*See Père Croiset on *Devotion to the Sacred Heart*.

†Canonically erected at Rome in the parish church of St. Lawrence of the Hill by a rescript of Pope Pius VI, January 6, 1790.

heart in the confederation of love formed in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”*

Mlle. Blin de Bourdon, being obliged to reside, from 1795 to 1797, sometimes at Gézaincourt and sometimes at Bourdon, only stayed at Amiens at intervals, but she was in constant communication with her spiritual mother, whom she consulted on all occasions. This circumstance led to a correspondence, of which thirty-three letters of the Blessed Mother still remain to us. Françoise treasured these letters all her life, and when dying bequeathed them to her daughters. The greater number are autograph, but a few, which contained matter relating to family affairs, have been copied and abridged by Françoise herself. Nothing reveals more fully than this correspondence the soul of Julie and the religious affection which united her with her whom she loved to call her “eldest daughter.” “Ah, my dear good lady,” she writes on July 5, “what a balm your letter was to my heart! I can never tell you how much our separation cost me; yet, by God’s grace, I am resigned and willing to make any sacrifice He asks of me. I confess I was on the point of being the first to write, so keenly did I feel your leaving, but I tried to make a sacrifice to our good God, though I thought continually of you, and

*The original is preserved in the archives of the Mother House at Namur.

kept thanking Him for letting me know you. Every day at the precious moment of Holy Communion I meet my good friend in our Lord—for I cannot call you otherwise; you know that it is in God and for God that I love you so tenderly. I thought of you very often during your journey; how the works of the Creator must have raised your soul to Him! I thank our good God for the favour He has done you of finding means to make your meditation. You gave me the greatest pleasure by telling me a little about it. That you may daily advance in that holy exercise is the grace I ask for you from our Lord, for it is thus that God fashions His saints. Oh, yes, that we may both be saints! that is what I beg of Him. I have had no news from Père Thomas since he went away. I do not know whether he is alive or dead, but certainly he is not leaving Montdidier at present. So you see, my dear friend, that I am quite alone with God alone. Ask Him, oh, ask Him to grant me grace to wish for nothing else in the world but this precious treasure—God alone, God alone for ever!”

A fortnight later Père Thomas is back, and Julie announces to Françoise that she hopes to renew with him on the first Friday of the month the act of consecration to the Sacred Heart, reminding her friend to do the same. “You know it is in that blessed refuge, the Heart of Jesus, that

we must meet;" and later, thanking her for some little presents: "You know where I place all my gratitude towards the instrument of Divine Providence in my regard? Ah, it is in the Heart of our dear and sweet Jesus that I lay up all your acts of charity so that none may be lost."

The public practices of Catholic worship were still forbidden by law in France. In the country, however, people had more liberty, and non-juring priests said Mass in the churches and chapels, and administered the sacraments to the faithful whenever they could. Nevertheless, Mlle. Blin's frequent communions at Bourdon drew upon her some criticism, and in one of her letters she half acknowledges to Julie that she is not altogether free from human respect on this point. The Servant of God answers on August 16, "I am confident that with God's help you will triumph over these petty troubles. . . . Ah, my dear good friend, what harm can a few mortal eyes do us? If those people only knew Him who gives Himself to us so lovingly, yes, if they only knew *the gift of God*, how they would envy our happiness! Consider it a privilege that God deigns to make use of you to edify the world by your holy example. Courage, my dear good lady." Then she adds with her accustomed simplicity: "How grateful I am for all your kindness to me! I am quite ashamed before God that He should give me not only bread but sugar! You

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wish me to speak to you of my wretched body—it is not worth it; but since you are anxious to know, I will say that it is good for nothing, absolutely good for nothing. I spend whole days, thanks be to God, in great pain, and my nights are sometimes worse. But, my dear good friend, what are my sufferings compared to all that our Lord vouchsafed to suffer for the love of me? When our good God sends me extra pain, I give a share of it to my dear friends in the faith. . . . Mlle. Lise is going on as well as can be; she is becoming more simple. On Thursday last she made a little retreat in my room with the permission of her spiritual father and mine.”

How wise are the counsels which her experience gives when, in her turn, Françoise is passing through those interior trials by which God purifies and strengthens His chosen ones! “Yes, my dear friend, this is the true path to heaven; let us live in the habitual disposition to be victims of God’s good pleasure in the different states by which He wills to try us. It is at such times that our Lord expects proofs of our fidelity. You know what we must do in spiritual darkness? *Be ready to bless God at all times*, as the royal Psalmist says. You know that the way of prayer is a way of death, especially of death to one’s own judgment, which wants to meddle with everything and arrange everything, even in the spiritual

life, after its own fashion. Nothing is more contrary to the spirit of God. However rigorous His conduct towards us may sometimes appear, we know that it is always the conduct of an infinitely wise, just and good Father, who is waiting for His children at the goal to which He leads them by different paths. And then, my dear, let us be honest with ourselves. Is it not true that we are quite capable of spoiling the whole work of grace in our souls? So that it is often very good for us to be visited by desolation and abandonment on the part of God. We must just do like little children, who on a dark night keep tight hold of the hand of father or mother and let themselves be led where they will. I bless our good God that all the states of soul through which He wills you to pass do not deter you from making your daily meditation; that perseverance will bring down upon you great graces."

Other difficulties Julie's strong faith and staunch loyalty to the Church settled with equal clearness and authority. The villagers both at Gézaincourt and Bourdon had sunk, since the expulsion of the clergy, into lamentable ignorance, and for a moment Françoise, in the face of their deplorable condition, hesitated as to whether it were not better to let them attend the churches served by the constitutional priests than to be thus entirely

deprived of religious instruction. At once Julie answers her: "So they tell you it is better to be a schismatic than to be in such brutish ignorance. My good friend, those who speak thus do not consider that to attend the instruction of a priest who has taken the oath is to put oneself out of the true Church. Now we cannot in conscience leave our brethren in error. Without a moment's hesitation, then, you must say to the mothers of families and others who consult you, whether on their own account or with regard to the education of their children, that no one can in conscience go to the sermons of schismatic priests any more than to their Mass, that they have left the bosom of the Church, and that those who follow them are also out of the Church and consequently out of the way of salvation. They tell you it is better to be in schism than in brutish ignorance! But make it clearly understood that those good souls who are in the impossibility of having legitimate pastors will not be held responsible for their want of instruction. God will not require more of them. Let them remain all their lives, if you will, without teaching and without Mass—they will not be out of the way of salvation. If they are in good faith, God will sooner send them an angel from heaven than allow them to perish. They tell you, my dear friend, that these things are obscure, difficult to harmonize;

but please remark that in matters of faith there can be no contradiction. The Church has condemned those who desert from the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman faith, so we have no need of further information on that score. The whole difficulty in point reduces itself to knowing what you have to answer when honest folk question you. This is the opinion of our reverend father: since you say they are absolutely in the dark about the matter, you must prudently explain that they do wrong in listening to the intruder, and lead them gently and gradually to the knowledge of the truth. He says that when a wrong idea about doctrine has once got into their heads, it is very hard to get it out again. And does not *The Imitation of Christ* tell us that there is more good to be got from a poor ignorant peasant than from a proud philosopher full of his own conceits?"

Was not Mère Blin de Bourdon right when, long years after, she invoked Julie Billiart as "virgin diligent in prayer," "sure guide in the path of perfection," "zealous promoter of the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls"?

And now the last ties which bound these two souls to earth were to be broken, that perfect detachment might leave them free for the work of God. Early in September, 1795, Julie wrote to Mlle. Blin: "Félicité is leaving to-day for my old home. Yesterday I had a letter from my brother

to say that my poor mother is very ill. He tells me he feels quite forsaken. I am sending him the little that remains to me out of what Providence gave me through you. I will write to you while my little girl is away." And a few days later: "I have lost my poor dear mother. You will understand what my heart feels, though by God's grace it is perfectly submissive to the decrees of His Providence. It is by successive sacrifices that He means me to belong to Him, to Him alone. Beg of Him then that I may be immolated to the good pleasure of our divine Master."

It was not long before a similar cross was laid on Françoise. The Viscount Blin de Bourdon was approaching his ninetieth year. Upright and honourable, he was satisfied with showing himself a perfect gentleman, and stood on the brink of the grave with no thought of God or of eternity. The doctrines of the new "philosophers," whose books filled his library, had darkened his intellect and chilled the faith in his heart. But his daughter had resolved to win him a happy death, and while during these two years she lavished on him every mark of filial affection, incessant prayers and acts of sacrifice went up for him to the throne of God, not only from her own heart but from that of her saintly friend at Amiens. The latter multiplies at this time her counsels of prudence and patience: "Who knows, my good friend, the moments of

God? Let us not grow weary of waiting for the Lord, who has waited so long for us. Ah, how good He is!" And again: "God's work in souls is done very gradually; we must not want to outrun grace. A word, a mark of affection, may sometimes do much. Charity will suggest to you a thousand little expedients. Say a few words as if by chance. Providence will bless them. . . . To-day after Holy Communion God brought you before me—you and your dear father, in a very special way, and I was filled with confidence that He would grant you what you are asking Him in the name of His Divine Son. Courage and confidence!" At last the aged nobleman yielded to the loving persistence of his daughter. He returned loyally and wholly to his faith and to his God, received the last sacraments with devotion, and on February 1, 1797, died peacefully, surrounded by his children, in the ninety-first year of his age. Julie writes: "So, my dear child, our good God has at last taken your father to Himself. May our Lord have mercy on Him and grant him peace. . . . The goodness of the Lord is an unfathomable abyss."

Not long before, Mme. Baudoin's chequered life had also come to a close. She died full of years and good works, assisted by the prayers of the Servant of God and the ministrations of Père Thomas, and with her last breath commended her

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Lise to Julie's maternal care. During these two years of more or less continued absence Françoise had seized every opportunity of returning to Amiens to refresh her soul. In 1796 we find her going through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for the full space of thirty days under the guidance of Père Thomas. She gave her director an exact account of her meditations, and each day noted down the lights received and the resolutions formed. The journal of this retreat has been preserved, and shows a soul already far on in the way of perfection. The Viscount's death now left her free to return to Amiens for good, and resisting all the entreaties of her brother and his wife, who, warmly attached to her, were eager to keep her with them, she hastened back to the house in the Rue des Augustins. And now this little group of Julie's first disciples organized itself into a species of community, "which gave," says Mère Blin de Bourdon, to whom we owe the details of these early Amiens days, "great edification to the world. They punctually followed a simple rule of life, chanted the Office of our Lady, lived in common, and called Julie *Ma Mère*." The rule in question had been drawn up by Père Thomas, who was intimately acquainted with all the six associates, and without whose advice Julie did nothing. The Constitution of the year III had readjusted religious affairs,

and, in the comparative tranquillity which Amiens now enjoyed, it became possible to add to the exercises of the contemplative life works of active charity, to visit the poor and the sick, and to teach the ignorant. Churches and chapels were now once again thrown open, and on August 6, 1797, the Bishop of Saint-Papoul, Mgr. Simon de Maillé, gave confirmation to large numbers in the Church of Saint-Remi. After the ceremony the prelaté paid a visit to the little community in the Hôtel Blin, again administering the sacrament in the very room of Mère Julie. The incident shows the universal esteem in which she was held, but it is memorable for another reason. Among the children who received the Holy Spirit by the bedside of the Servant of God was one destined to be the father of a martyr. This was Isidore Nicholas Daveluy, whose son became coadjutor bishop of Corea and was beheaded for his faith in 1866.

It might indeed have seemed that Julie had now around her the nucleus of that Society which she had seen beneath the cross at Compiègne. But it was not so; and it is noteworthy that though she appears to have known clearly that she was destined to work with others for the salvation of souls, she had no intention at this time of founding a new congregation. "One step enough for me," was all through life her motto, and God had

not yet made His voice clearly heard. Nay, He seemed—as He so often does seem to our human eyes—to scatter the seeds just as they were beginning to grow. One by one the five young girls were drawn from Julie's side into other paths. Lise Baudoin was the first to go. Of an excessively sensitive temperament, she passed quickly from one extreme to the other, and Julie's letters allude more than once to her "ups and downs." At one and the same moment attracted by the world and drawn to God, she now yielded to her passionate attachment for a married sister in Paris who was bent on having her to live with her. They had scarcely been reunited three days, when Lise saw her dearly loved sister snatched suddenly from her by death. But she never renewed the ties with Amiens, which she had so hastily broken. She spent some years in indecision, and died while yet young. Jeanne de Méry made a brilliant marriage, becoming the wife of the Marquis Ignatius de Ferretti, of the family of Pius IX. Aglaé never married. The two Dorias seem to have turned to good account Mère Julie's lessons. Gabrielle married the Count de Cornulier and led a retired life, carrying out the good works begun at Amiens and beloved by all the poor on her estates. Josephine Doria spent two more years with Mère Julie, and finally entered the Order of the Visitation. The following extract from the

Annals of the Convent at Boulogne, where she died, is interesting as showing the effect of Mère Julie's influence: "God in His love for our sister, Josephine Doria, gave her an admirable guide in the virtuous Mère Julie Billiard. Hundreds of times this inspired soul repeated to her both by word of mouth and by letter that her perfection depended on the cross, that she must expect to lead a dying life, that a Spouse of Jesus Christ had no other pledge of His love than crosses, contradictions, humiliations: in fine this good mother was never weary of encouraging her disciple in the road to this mystic death by showing her its advantages and reminding her of the strength which God's graces and His love would give her, in order to attain it."

The peaceful days at Amiens were soon rudely interrupted. The law of September 4, 1797, inaugurated the odious régime which has been aptly termed *Terreur à froid*. Once more priests were required to take the oath of hatred to royalty, and those who refused were hunted, imprisoned, transported to the Ilc-de-Rhé or to Cayenne and treated with the utmost rigour. The very day after the promulgation of the law, the municipal authorities at Amiens were dismissed, as infected with royalist principles and making common cause with the refractory clergy. The churches of St-Germain and St-Remi were closed, domici-

liary visits were multiplied, and towards the end of the same year six priests were shut up in the prison of Bicêtre. Père Thomas was of course the object of active search. Twice was the Hôtel Blin ransacked from top to bottom without success—a third time the man of God only escaped by a kind of miracle. It was night, and he had already gone to bed when the alarm came, so that he had not time to reach his hiding-place before his pursuers were upon him. He hurried, however, to a hay-loft above the stables, but was perceived by the gendarmes as he climbed the ladder and prevented from drawing it after him. "I've caught my bird!" shouted the half-intoxicated republican, "you shan't escape this time, *calotin*." Just at that moment the man's candle providentially fell and went out—the Abbé leapt boldly over him as he stooped to pick it up, and succeeded, he hardly knew how, in gaining his hiding-place. The infuriated band searched the whole house in vain, and at last were forced to withdraw, swearing that it would not be long before they renewed the attack. Julie and Françoise had passed that terrible night in earnest prayer for their spiritual guide, and as soon as morning dawned a consultation was held as to the means to be adopted for the safety of the Abbé and a more secure retreat for themselves. Josephine Doria possessed a small estate at Bet-

tencourt, and this she now placed at Julie's disposal. Thither the Servant of God was removed, accompanied by the Abbé Thomas, Françoise de Bourdon and the faithful Félicité, on the night of June 16, 1799.

CHAPTER VI

Laying the Foundations

CUVILLY, Amiens, Bettencourt—these three names are especially linked with the origin of the Institute of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. The Picard village had seen Julie's childish apostolate, her first graces and her first crosses; Amiens had witnessed the meeting of the co-foundresses; but it was at the little hamlet of Bettencourt that the first stone of the edifice was to be definitely laid. Bettencourt-Saint-Ouen is a pretty village about twenty miles to the north-west of Amiens. A gently rising ground dotted with homesteads and cottages looks down upon a smiling pastoral valley watered by the Nièvre. Towards the south the hill forms a steep and sudden descent, and the view from the summit is singularly picturesque. The Château of Bettencourt, as it was called, was a quaint seventeenth-century house with a high-pitched roof and a double row of dormer windows, a courtyard, and a large garden shut in by high walls. Here Julie was to pass two more years of prayer and of patient suffering. She could afford to wait. More

than one passage in the Amiens letters makes it clear that God had shown her the destiny of Françoise Blin de Bourdon linked with her own in some life-work for His glory. "I have always present before my eyes what I once mentioned to you—that God will let me end my days with you. You will have occasion to exercise your zeal together with me." Again, and still more definitely: "As my *eldest daughter*, you will share with me all the mercies of the Lord." "I tell you, my dear child, that God has done me the favour of Himself showing me the line you must follow; keep very exactly to what I tell you." "You must, my dear child, unite yourself to me as closely as possible, so that we may enter into the plans of God's providence over us. I have no sort of doubt that He has some special design in your regard; we will take but one step at a time, consulting each moment the blessed will of God." Finally, on the death of the Vicomte de Bourdon: "As soon as I learnt your father's death, I saw you throw yourself into my arms. And I thought the moment had come when God should give you to me and me to you so strongly that death alone should separate us." Yes, Julie could afford to wait. One of the most remarkable points in her ardent and energetic character, is this pausing for the impulse of God's hand before undertaking any work. She was as strong to wait as she

was to act, for both the waiting and the action were born of that beautiful faith of hers, which trusted her "good God" through all trials, and followed Him over all obstacles.

We who have traced Julie's life so far, shall not be surprised that the cross was to mark the first weeks of her sojourn in her new home. Not only did she fall dangerously ill, but Françoise was attacked by small-pox. The latter, however, speedily recovered; and Julie herself, when once convalescent, became so much stronger that she was able to exchange her bed for an invalid chair. Better still, her speech became free-er and her use of it more frequent. Here again obedience obtained what natural remedies had been powerless to effect; Père Thomas used to put questions to her and order her to answer; gradually the power of articulation returned, and, though she still often kept silence, she was now quite able to converse with those who visited her. The simple words in which Mère Blin de Bourdon's memoirs record this circumstance would seem to imply a supernatural favour. "Towards the end of her stay at Bettencourt, Père Thomas went to visit his old home in Normandy, and during his absence God restored to our mother the full use of her speech. She required it more than ever for the instruction of her neighbours." There was indeed plenty to be done. Three months

after the death of Pius VI at Valence, Napoleon's powerful hand delivered France from the yoke of the Directory, and the Church, which her enemies had fondly imagined to have been buried together with the last Pope, was once again free. The Abbé Thomas could now fearlessly celebrate his daily Mass in the oratory of the château, and exercise his zeal in a parish long deprived of its pastor.*

While he gave himself to the functions of his ministry and to the instruction of the men of his flock, he entrusted the women and children to Julie and Françoise. Every morning the good priest appeared at an open window of the château, and, armed with a speaking-trumpet, summoned the villagers to Catechism. The first indifference soon gave way before the kindness and devotedness of the missionary and his assistants. Young and old obeyed the call, while the little girls trooped around Julie and Françoise, and their mothers stood by, with their infants in their arms, to listen to their lessons. It was Cuvilly over again. These scholars of divers ages learnt not only to know, love and serve the God whom they had forgotten, but to read, to write, to cipher and to do different kinds of needlework. Little rewards were distributed from time

* M. Trinquet, Curé of Bettencourt, had been forced to fly. He returned later on to his parish, and died there in 1807.

to time to the most industrious; and one of these souvenirs, a small statue of the Madonna and Child, delicately carved in bone, may still be seen in the house of an old woman at Bettencourt. In a short time the whole face of the village was changed. One touching story which has come down to us shows how deeply the lessons given had taken root. An old republican, who had been brought back to his duty by the Abbé Thomas, was reduced to beggary. Every day he began his rounds by calling at the château, and as soon as he had received his alms was always seen to hurry away in the same direction. The Abbé, curious to know the meaning of this, one morning followed him, and saw him stop before an old blind beggar, and, respectfully lifting his hat, put into his hand what he had just received. The priest asked the motive of this conduct, and was deeply moved at the beautiful reply. "I take off my hat," said the old republican, "before that man as before the living image of Jesus Christ suffering. I am so glad to be able to give him every morning the first alms sent me by Providence. That old man is more to be pitied than I, and does not deserve his misfortunes as I do."

More than one holy priest—among others Julie's old friend the Abbé de Lamarche—came to Bettencourt from time to time; but one day Père Thomas brought to her a religious whose





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word was not only to decide the future vocation of the former Doctor of the Sorbonne, but to set afloat the barque of Notre-Dame. Père Varin, superior general of the Fathers of the Faith, had come over on foot from Amiens, whither in 1801 he had been summoned by M. Louis Sellier and the Abbé Corbie, to negotiate the transfer into the hands of his congregation of the Oratory School, which these gentlemen directed. M. Sellier, then a layman, was indeed himself called to the religious life, and had already been accepted by Père Varin. But, like so many others, he hesitated to take the final step, and without precisely wishing to draw back had begged Père Varin to consult on the subject of his vocation his own director Père Thomas, whose decision he promised to regard as final. The result was, as we have said, that not only M. Sellier, but Père Thomas himself, was recruited to the Fathers of the Faith, and hence to the Society of Jesus. But Père Varin had another work to do for God at Bettencourt. His gift of discernment in spiritual things and his long experience were not slow to discover "the treasures of grace hidden in Julie's simple and generous soul."* Nor did he hesitate in the face of her helpless condition to tell her that she was called to labour for God's glory in a wider field than she had hitherto done. And Julie,

**Life of Père Varin*, by Père A. Guidée, S.J.

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though she answered humbly, as Mary to the angel, "How shall this thing be?" like Mary added, *Ecce ancilla Domini*. This was not Père Varin's only visit; and each interview, as it made him more intimately acquainted with her lively faith and unshaken trust in God, confirmed him more and more in his belief in her mission, and he ended by giving her a formal order, in the name of God, to undertake the work of the education of youth. And so, as Père Sellier has remarked, he who was at this very time founding with Mme. Barat the Congregation of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, was also chosen by God to be the promoter of the Institute of Notre-Dame. Père Varin himself always looked back with pleasure to the memory of his first meeting with Julie Billiard. Writing in his old age to Mère Blin de Bourdon on the occasion of the death of Père Thomas in 1833, he says, "Oh, how many memories dear to my heart are connected with the time when I first made acquaintance with good Father Thomas! It was at Bettencourt . . . and the good Julie, and her faithful companion, and all the results of that holy friendship formed and blessed by the Lord! Ah no! these things will never be blotted out of my mind, for they belong to the memory of the heart."* Père

* Letter from Laval, dated April 8, 1833. Archives of the Mother House.

Thomas, though admitted into the Society of the Fathers of the Faith, was authorized still to direct the little spiritual family which owed him so much; and when, on the reopening of the churches, private chapels were closed, the new Bishop of Amiens, Mgr. de Villaret, made an exception in Julie's favour. He had stayed at the château when he came to administer Confirmation in the canton of Picquigny and been touched by her infirm condition.

In the month of February, 1803, the little colony once more turned their steps towards Amiens. The villagers wept to see them go, but the seed had been cast in good ground, and it has borne its fruit. Since those days the parish has remained thoroughly Christian, and the people continue to attach to the religious education of their children an importance which, alas, is but too rare in these days. Nor have they forgotten those to whom they owed these sentiments of faith. The memory of Mère Julie and her companion is still held by them in benediction. One of the witnesses in the Process of Canonization had been parish priest at Bettencourt from 1832 to 1860. He tells us that he had constantly heard Julie spoken of as a saint by those who had known her; and that old men would raise their hats, and fold their hands as if in prayer, when speaking of "Mademoiselle Julie."

The two friends took up temporary quarters in a small and inconvenient house without a garden in the Rue du Puits-à-Brandil. Here Julie's paralysed condition gave her much to suffer, but she never left off gathering the children about her for Catechism. "That," said Mère Blin de Bourdon, "was her very life." Félicité Degouy, who had been with her aunt since the age of seven, now left to be married;* her place was taken by Constance Blondel, a relation of Père Thomas.

The Fathers of the Faith were giving up the house of the Oratory which was close to the Hôtel de Bourdon, and Julie and Françoise had their eye upon it; but Père Varin destined it for the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and settled the matter by writing to Mme. Barat, "Go and see our good Julie, and tell her from me that the work to which our Lord calls her deserves to be bought by some sacrifices." At last a house was found in the Rue Neuve, not large, but healthy and more convenient than the other—fitted moreover by its religious antecedents for its pious destination. It went by the name of the *Blue Children's Home*, from the uniform of the orphan boys who had formerly inhabited it. Behind the high altar of Amiens Cathedral may be seen the celebrated *Enfant Pleureur*, a masterpiece of sculpture by Blasses, which stands over the

* She married the schoolmaster at Saint-Ouen, M. Thérasse.



DOORWAY OF THE CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART, AMIENS

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mausoleum of the founder of the orphanage, Canon Lucas. Mary seemed to throw her mantle over her daughters from the very outset; it was on the feast of Our Lady ad Nives, August 5, 1803, that the removal was made to this house which the Institute looks upon as its cradle. Mgr. de Villaret's permission still held good, so that, as Mère Blin de Bourdon affectionately notes, "the chapel existed before the community"; and it was thus rather Our Lord who welcomed His spouses to their home than they who offered a new home to Him. The traditions of the house were renewed, for the first children confided by Père Varin to Mère Julie were eight poor little orphans. Three of these paid a small pension, the others were entirely supported by the house. The man of God now urged her to gather round her persons of sound judgement and of good will, without regard to rank or fortune. "God," he said, "will bless your apostolic spirit." Mgr. de Villaret took the warmest interest in the work, and Françoise de Bourdon offered to defray the immediate expenses. Once convinced of the will of God, Julie did not hesitate; and the two foundresses, with those of their old friends the Carmelites who still survived, forthwith began a novena to our Lady to obtain postulants. And Our Lady brought them, not this time from the ranks of the rich and high-born, that her daughters seeing their vocation,

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that there were not among them many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, might not glory in the great edifice of which they were to be the first stones, and that all might recognise the hand of God Who had chosen the foolish and weak things of the world to confound the wise and the strong.

The first who presented herself was Catherine Duchâtel of Rheims. She had already been received among the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, but, believing herself called to evangelize the poor, asked for a trial with Mere Julie. Pere Varin often sent Mme. Barat to visit Julie in these early days. "Go and see our good Julie and Mlle. Blin for me," he writes on one occasion. "Oh, how their patience too is tried! For my part I rejoice in the Lord over their little difficulties. All ground for hope must be taken away from them, that they may hope against hope."

February 2, 1804, is a day for ever memorable in the annals of the Institute of Notre-Dame. On that day Pere Varin came to say Mass in the chapel of the Rue Neuve. Julie Billiart, Françoise Blin de Bourdon and Catherine Duchâtel received holy Communion at his hands, and in presence of the Blessed Sacrament made or renewed the vow of chastity, to which they added that of devoting themselves to the Christian education of girls. A remarkable note in

Mère Blin de Bourdon's memoirs adds another purpose, the importance of which is trebly brought home to us in our own days and in the light of the present work of the Congregation. "They further proposed to train religious teachers who should go wherever their services were asked for; the future extension of the Institute is contained in this resolution formulated by the foundresses at the foot of the altar." Those who trace the workings of the finger of God in human events, will not deem it a mere coincidence that, when half a century later the Sisters of Notre-Dame undertook the direction of the first Catholic Training College for schoolmistresses in England, it was opened on this same feast of the Purification.

There is one more incident connected with Candlemas, though of later date than the period of which we are writing, which makes the feast especially dear to Notre-Dame. It was in 1806. The Community was, according to custom, gathered round their Mother in the work-room for the evening "Instruction" in Christian doctrine. Julie spoke in burning words of the mystery of the day and then all at once intoned with extraordinary joy of spirit the canticle of Simeon which was taken up by her daughters. *Lumen ad revelationem gentium*, sang the Sisters, when suddenly Julie's voice broke, her eyes fixed themselves on the crucifix in a rapt gaze of love,

her countenance glowed with light. The whole community saw her thus in ecstasy, raised above the ground, motionless, inundated with the very beatitude of heaven. It is a constant tradition in the Institute that in that rapture God had shown His servant that her children should one day cross the seas and oceans to carry the light of revelation to nations sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. The vision has seen its fulfilment.

From that first consecration on the feast of the Purification dates the name of "Sisters of Notre-Dame."

The little community received from Père Varin's hands a provisional rule by way of trial, and Julie and Françoise put the seal on their dedication by renewing their consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Catherine Duchâtel, whose health had given way, asked soon after to return to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and died in their House some eighteen months later, leaving to Mère Julie's orphans some furniture and articles of clothing. Her place was not long empty. A saintly priest, the Abbé Louis Leleu, a native of Chépy near Abbeville, had just entered the Society of the Fathers of the Faith. His favourite sister Victoire longed in her turn to consecrate herself to God, and Père Leleu now presented her to Julie together with one of her friends named Justine Garson.

Both girls were highly gifted in mind and heart; Victoire especially was destined to become one of the pillars of the Institute, and, as Sister Anastasie, to fill in it several important posts. She was already twenty-four years of age, and was distinguished for her rare prudence, the sureness of her judgement and an angelic sweetness of disposition. "By what name shall I call her?" wrote Mère St-Joseph twenty years later when announcing her death to the Sisters, "I will call her Charity, Purity, Simplicity, Gentleness, Courtesy." A few days after these two Geneviève Gosselin, from Bettencourt, entered.

The Fathers of the Faith had been charged by the Bishop of Amiens with the catechetical instructions in the Cathedral. The girls of the parish were confided to the Sisters of Notre-Dame to the great satisfaction of M. Duminy, the Curé, who held them in very high esteem. One of these pupils of the Blessed Mother, Louise Lesage, became a Carmelite under the name of Mother Marie-Thérèse, and in her extreme old age loved to go back on her Amiens memories—how she had sat at Mère Julie's feet in the little school-room, where, unable to move from paralysis, she gave her Catechism lessons; and how people always spoke of her as a saint and believed that she worked miracles. Mother Marie-Thérèse was one of the witnesses who testified to the sanctity

of the Servant of God in the Process held in 1882. "Every Sunday and four or five times in the week," she related, "Mère Julie would get together the young girls of the town, give them religious instruction, read to them and practise them in singing hymns. These meetings were very popular, for good Mère Julie had the art of mingling the agreeable with the useful. Sometimes Père Varin himself presided." Another testimony to the efficiency of Julie's teaching has reached us. In 1875, in the town of Northampton, a priest, making his rounds among the poor, came across a very infirm old woman. She was a native of France, had entered service in England, married there, and had been reduced to extreme poverty and want. Before giving her the last rites, the priest questioned her on her religion. She told him she had been instructed when young by Mère Julie Billiart at a school in the Rue Neuve, Amiens, and that she owed it to her to have preserved her faith and virtue in the midst of the greatest dangers.

Julie's rare moments of leisure were occupied in completing the religious education of her Sisters, in training them to good methods of teaching, and stimulating their zeal for the salvation of souls. Contemporary witnesses tell us that she drew tears from their eyes when with burning accents she would exclaim, "My dear, good daugh-

ters, we are but poor little women [*femmelettes*], and yet God vouchsafes to entrust to us souls to be put in the way of salvation. Ah! labour to render yourselves fit for the great work to which God calls you. Lean upon Him who is the strength of the weak; have so strong a confidence in Him that all the demons in hell cannot shake it. Say to Him, 'My God, I am but a child who can do nothing and can say nothing: do all Thyself, Lord; Thy own glory is at stake.'" Julie indeed leant on Him with that trust which has never been confounded; and for her He was about to do what His glory required, "because no word shall be impossible with God."

CHAPTER VII

The Great Missions

IN the year 1804 Pope Pius VII published a Jubilee to celebrate the restoration of religion in France, and the Fathers of the Faith gave in Amiens a great mission, which was carried on simultaneously in the five parishes of the city from April 29 to May 27. Père Thomas was among the missionaries; two others, Père Lambert and Père Enfantin, were lodged at the Rue Neuve. The mission was a complete success; in the Cathedral alone the audience numbered some 10,000 persons, and no fewer than 600 marriages were revalidated. Mère Julie's little community was assiduous in its attendance at the exercises; she herself was constantly carried to them in a sedan chair. The Fathers, moreover, found in the Sisters valuable co-operators in their labour for souls, and entrusted them with the entire instruction and preparation for the sacraments of the women and girls of the masses.

"In this apostolic work," says Père Sellier, who was on the spot, "Julie displayed all the activity at her command, and performed the part



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of a veritable missionary."* Françoise Blin de Bourdon was busy from morning till night teaching the Catechism, and neither of the two friends ever wearied of making the people repeat their morning and night prayers and explaining to them the duties of their state. The other Sisters took charge of the school-children.

We have mentioned the name of Père Enfantin. This extraordinary man was to play an important part in Julie's history. Born in the neighbourhood of Valence, he had been ordained priest in a barn in the very height of the Reign of Terror by the Archbishop of Vienne, Mgr. d'Aviau-du-Bois-de-Sanzay; that eminent prelate held him in high esteem as one of the apostolic men raised up by God at the beginning of the century to bring back erring souls to the way of truth.† His deep faith and burning zeal were served by a character full of energy and a gift of eloquence whose vehemence and vigour carried all before it; in a mission given at Tours, which was on the point of failing, a single sermon of his was enough to turn the tide and ensure success. The tenderness of his piety was as remarkable as the austerity of his life. In the direction of souls he concentrated his main effort on thoroughly grounding them in humility, the touchstone of

**Life of Père Varin.*

†See *Vie de Mgr. d'Aviau* and *Vie de Mme. de Franssu.*

true virtue. Père Enfantin soon saw that Julie's was no ordinary soul, but one that could stand being put into the crucible; and into the crucible he accordingly put her. With an unsparing hand he subjected her to every kind of mortification and humiliation, crucified nature in its every fibre, and with a view to counterbalancing the favours she had received from heaven—all of which her new director obliged her to discover to him—put her through a course of spiritual treatment which seems to us hardly credible, but which was designed by the Father to make her advance with giant strides in the path of perfection. Père Enfantin was not a man to stop at difficulties. He had made up his mind that Julie would do much more for God's glory if she recovered her health, and indeed the happy results of the experiments made during the Amiens mission rendered the Fathers of the Faith keenly desirous of associating her in a wider measure in their apostolic labours.

It was the day after the close of the great mission, Monday, May 28. Père Enfantin came in to Mère Julie, and in his usual abrupt way said to her: "I begin a novena to-day to the Sacred Heart for a person in whom I am interested. Will you join me in it?" Without asking further explanation Julie promised, and prayed fervently for the unknown intention. On the fifth day of the

novena the Fathers solemnly opened the month of the Sacred Heart, and with great pomp erected the Mission Cross in the cemetery of the church of St. James, in presence of the Vicar-General, M. Clausel de Coussergues, the whole body of the clergy and an immense concourse of people. Père Enfantin preached one of his famous popular sermons. In the evening of the busy day Mère Julie was sitting alone in her little garden, when her confessor came up and without any preamble said: "Mother, if you have any faith, take one step in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." Julie rose—felt at once that a sudden cure had been worked in her—and the feet which for two and twenty years had refused to support her at the word of obedience took the required step.

"Take another."

She did so.

"A third."

She obeyed.

"That will do; sit down."

And Julie, with the simplicity of a child, sat down again, declaring at the same time that she was quite capable of walking further. But the Father would not allow it, and went off, forbidding her to tell the Sisters what had happened.

It was Friday—the Friday following the feast of Corpus Christi, and the first day of the month of June.

The long preparation was over; but who shall say that those years of waiting and of pain had been time lost? For "we know that to them that love God all things work together unto good, to such as according to His purpose are called to be saints."* Julie was assuredly so called; and she had found strength in infirmity, confidence in trial, humility in powerlessness; the instrument was ready for the hand of that God who loves to choose the weak things of the world to compass His greatest works.

When she found herself alone, Julie poured out her loving thanksgivings to the Heart of our Lord, promising to devote to His glory alone the health just restored to her. Then, not to betray her secret, she returned to her room—which was on the ground floor—in her accustomed way, by moving first one leg of her chair and then the other. The Sisters had already retired for the night and noticed nothing, for in spite of her infirmities Julie always managed to get to bed without assistance, slipping on to her low couch from a chair of the same height. Next morning she mounted the staircase which led to the little chapel by her usual method, sitting down and raising herself from step to step by the aid of her hands. On the landing a low chair was always ready to help her to enter the chapel; but this

* 1 Cor. i, 27.

time she took it up and carried it to her place. At the moment of Communion, instead of dragging herself to the rails on her knees, as she had hitherto been obliged to do, she stood up and walked forward. Her place being close to the sanctuary, she had only a few steps to take, and the thing passed unnoticed, thanks to the recollection of the Sisters and to the fact that in the chapel they were accustomed to wear a sort of black hood which made it difficult to see what passed around them; the pupils, too, wore white veils. After Mass, as soon as every one had left the chapel, Mère Julie confided the favour she had received to Père Thomas, for the injunction of silence laid upon her expressly excepted him; the good priest wept tears of joy. But for the rest of that day, and the two following, she contrived to keep her cure still a secret from every one else, even carrying self-control so far as to remain sitting on her chair when, on the following Sunday, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament passed her door.

The end of the novena came, and Julie was at length authorized to make the matter known.

On the last day she had prolonged her thanksgiving after Holy Communion, the Sisters had gone down to breakfast, and the orphans with their teachers were in an adjoining room, the glass door of which looked on to the staircase.

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Suddenly one of the youngest children, little Michaëlie, gave a scream: "Look! *Notre Mère* is walking downstairs!" "I know not," relates Mère Blin de Bourdon in her *Memoirs*, "what sort of stupor seized us, not one of us stirred to go and meet her. Erect, and with firm tread, Mère Julie entered the room and saluted us with *Te Deum laudamus!*" The general emotion is easy to imagine. In a first transport of gratitude the Sisters threw themselves on their knees, and then followed their mother back to the chapel to finish, amid many happy tears, the hymn of thanksgiving.

This cure made a deep impression on all who heard of it, not in Amiens alone, but in many other towns of the Empire; and it gave a fresh impulse to the devotion to the Sacred Heart. A pious priest of Amiens, passing once through Soissons, told the story in a school kept by a Sister of the Infant Jesus, whose community, like so many others, had been suppressed. So great was the emotion enkindled both in mistress and pupils that they began, there and then, a novena of thanksgiving, reciting the *Memorare* from a copy of the prayer which had belonged to Blessed Julie. The narrator's niece, a child of twelve, had been the most eager among the listeners, and throughout the whole of the novena felt in her soul such powerful attractions of grace that they

seemed tokens of the vocation which led her later into the Institute of Notre-Dame. "I thought," she said, "that a person in whose regard God so powerfully moved another must surely be very dear to Him."

The popular voice attributed the miracle to Mère Julie's faith and simple obedience; the Fathers of the Faith saw in it an index of God's will to use her for the extension of His glory. "This thought of God's greater glory," says Père Sellier, "was the very soul of all Julie's actions."

"Lord," she would repeat in her unselfish love, "Lord, if Thou dost not will to employ me to win souls to Thee, give me back my old infirmities."

The fire that burned in her soul was fed by a prayer that was sometimes so rapt as to seem almost ecstatic. During the Process of Information held at Amiens in 1882 a M. Le Sellyer, Doctor of Law, who in an advanced old age kept full possession of all his faculties, gave the following testimony:

"My parents had in their service a woman named Sophie Lachambre, between thirty and forty years of age, a person of uncommon good sense and solid piety. She told me, and others in my presence, that, having heard people speak of Mère Julie's frequent ecstasies after Holy Communion, she had expressed a desire to wit-

ness the same. One of her friends got her admitted into the convent chapel while the Servant of God was making her thanksgiving; she was on her knees, with her arms extended in the form of a cross, and her eyes raised to heaven. The sight made such an impression on Sophie that she withdrew, overcome with awe. I can certify on my own account," added the witness, "that Mère Julie enjoyed in Amiens an established reputation for sanctity, and was spoken of in terms of veneration." This reputation for holiness had, indeed, long been hers. Years before the date we have reached, though on what precise occasion is uncertain, she had visited Paris, and stopped on her way thither at the house of Mme. Huelle, sister to M. Joret, the curate at Gournay, who, like his bishop, was martyred in the massacre of the *Carmes*. The niece of this lady, Mme. Eugénie Ancelle, examined as a witness in the Process of Beatification, and, asked if she had ever met the Reverend Mère Julie Billiart personally, replied: "When I was six or seven years old, I just caught a glimpse of her through the little window of her travelling conveyance. I was extremely desirous of seeing her, but my mother said to me: 'No, my child; you must not disturb her, for she is praying to the good God; *she is a Saint.*' These last words filled me with curiosity; I did not want to be disobedient, and on the

other hand I much wished to see a Saint; so I went close up to the carriage, and succeeded in getting sight of her for a moment. She was praying." The same witness, who had heard much of the Servant of God from her mother, said: "To have Mère Julie under the roof was a festival; so deep was the respect she inspired that one felt inclined to kneel down before her."

Whether Père Enfantin feared for Julie some temptation to human complacency in the extraordinary favours bestowed upon her, or whether he merely indulged in her regard his own somewhat rough and very impetuous character, it is impossible to say; but he now began to treat her humble and sensitive soul with renewed, and it would seem excessive, rigour.

Although the paralysis was cured, her stomach remained weak, and unable to bear certain kinds of food; nor could she, without pain, drink cold water. Her director ordered her to make her meals of the dishes in question, and put her on ice-cold water, mixed, on occasion, with ashes; he often obliged her to eat, in the refectory, on her knees. In the presence of her own community he would load her with reproaches, couched in terms of the most stinging contempt, and was even known to go so far as to dash a glass of water into her face. The poor Sisters positively trembled at the severity of his looks and words.

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Immediately after her cure, Julie entered upon a ten days' retreat, both to thank God for His mercy and to prepare herself for the work before her. The opportunity was not lost by Père Enfantin. He made her pass the time in a garret, overwhelmed her with penances enough to have exhausted her newly acquired strength, and doubled the vehemence of his contemptuous expressions towards her. His zeal was ingenious in discovering ways of mortifying his willing penitent. Mère Blin de Bourdon gives us an account of one of these. "For twelve or fifteen years," she writes, "Mère Julie had kept with her a cat, given to her by her good curé of Cuvilly, M. Dangicourt. Often and often during her long infirmity the creature had warmed her feet, and been to her a useful and legitimate distraction. Her director, whether he suspected in Julie some too natural attachment, or whether he merely wished to push his experiments on her further, determined to deprive her of it. This in itself was nothing; but as the cat fell sick, he took it into his head to order our Mother to kill it herself. He was well aware that she had a perfect horror of anything of this sort; she could never even bring herself to order the cook to kill any animal, and it is not too much to say that he was, in this, requiring of Julie what was above her natural strength. But obedience carried her

through. She went up to the garret to fetch the poor animal, took it in her arms, and having set it down in the little courtyard, looked at it once gently and sadly, and then, seizing a stick, despatched it with one heavy blow on the head." The terrible director himself was satisfied; and he lost no opportunity, in her absence, of expressing to the Sisters his deep veneration for the Foundress, and of explaining to them that all his conduct in her regard was merely a trial of her virtue and a means of further sanctification. More than once he told Mère Blinde Bourdon that to speak to Julie as he did he was obliged to make an effort over himself that caused him to tremble. He assured her further that Julie had received from God very great and very rare graces—a testimony doubly valuable in the mouth of a man who had the direction of several souls extraordinarily favoured by grace, and who was himself raised to a high degree of perfection and prayer. Whatever we may think of his method, Julie's robust soul came forth from the trial braced with a fresh energy and tempered for great things.

The Fathers had been so well pleased with Mère Julie's work during the successful mission at Amiens that when, immediately after it, they were summoned to St-Valery-sur-Somme, and thence to Abbeville, they pressed her to follow them and second their zeal in the same way.

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As soon, therefore, as her retreat was over, leaving the little community to the care of Mère Blin de Bourdon, she set out with Sister Anastasie (Leleu) as her companion. And now begins the series of Julie's letters to her daughters, which unconsciously reveal so much of her own character and are so charming in their mixture of *naïveté* and strength, of maternal tenderness and authority, and whose every page breathes her love for souls and her simple trust in God.

“J.M.J. Deo gratias! June 15, 1804.

“May the name of the Lord be for ever blessed for all His mercies! At last we reached St-Valery, at midnight. Rather late, as you see!—every one had gone to bed. But the good God took care of us, and we found some charitable people willing to take us in. The weather was terribly warm, but as both the heat and the cold come from our good God, blessed be His holy name! To-day I had a happiness I have been deprived of for twenty-three years—that of assisting at Mass in the Parish Church. You must thank God for me. Then, too, I had the happiness of going to Communion in the church: what favours our Blessed Saviour is bestowing on me! . . . For my Catechism lessons I have at my disposal a little garden and a large room. May the name of the Lord be praised and blessed for all!”

"The mission at St-Valery is doing well," she writes again on June 23. "It is quite certain that the devil has been doing his best to spoil the work, but our good Fathers are satisfied, and so is the Curé. People who had not been to confession for thirty or forty years have publicly returned to God.

"I feel sure you are all keeping your little rule as well as you can; I ask our good God earnestly to lead you by His Holy Spirit. Courage, my dear daughters; it is courage that we need in the times in which we live—great souls, who take to heart the interests of the greater glory of God. Ask this grace for me. . . I must finish my letter to go to a good man whom I am teaching to say the *Credo*. He is nearly seventy, and has not yet made his first Communion. He has the best will in the world. A thousand kind messages to my dear, good little Mme. Barat; I am so glad that she goes to see you and to take the air in our garden."

One likes to note this little witness to the friendship between two servants of God whom the Church proclaimed venerable almost simultaneously.

Mère Julie's compassion for sinners drew tears from her eyes in speaking of them. "Ah, souls, poor souls!" she would say; "the good God wants to save them, and they blindly precipitate them-

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selves into hell!" She had, in fact, just witnessed a terrible calamity. With a view to hindering the success of the mission, a number of young men had organized a boating party on the Somme. The sky was unclouded when a sudden gust of wind made the sailing vessel capsize, and one hundred giddy pleasure-seekers perished in the water. The hand of God was too visible not to be recognized, and to many in the town the fear of the Lord became the beginning of wisdom.*

During her stay at St-Valery it pleased God to put His servant's faith to a new trial. She was perfectly cured of her paralysis, but so long an inaction of the feet had, naturally, left them excessively weak. One day, as she was walking in the street, some horses near her gave a sudden start, and Julie, in moving quickly aside to avoid them, sprained her foot severely. It swelled so much and was so painful that a return to Amiens was thought of, and the missionaries, seeing her hardly able to walk, began to call in question the reality of her cure. But Julie knew what physician to seek. Dragging herself to a church, she passed several hours on her knees before the Blessed Sacrament, "exposing her needs," says Mère St-Joseph, "to the eyes of our Lord." She came out cured.

* *Vie du Père Varin*, p. 157.

On July 9 Julie, on the point of leaving St-Valery for Abbeville, writes to her community:

“I think I hear all my dear daughters saying: Our Mother has given us up, she gives us no more news. Ah, do not say that, my dear good children. Here I am stealing the dinner hour to write you a few lines—dinner takes no longer here than during the Amiens mission. May the name of the Lord be praised and blessed in everything! What is certain, my dear daughters, is that the good God is always very good. You will have heard of my visit to good Father Varin at Abbeville. I am glad to have made this journey, though I was well shaken in a little conveyance, and the rain came down upon us. All that was very good for us. I saw some nuns there who were much astonished at seeing me able to trot about in this fashion. May God’s holy name be praised for all things. Let us love Him, let us love Him, and all will go well. I hope I shall find every one in our house loving and serving God. Pray for me, my dear daughters. I think I shall be going to Abbeville this day week; I do not know how long I shall stay there. Pray that my going may be for the greater glory of God, and that I may remain as long as He sees fit. I let myself be led by the hand, which is the right thing for me to do. M. Clausel de Coussergues told me to go to

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Abbeville; he did not say how long I was to stop."

On July 18 she writes again :

"We left St-Valery at ten in the morning amid the tears of the whole town. Every one was lamenting the departure of our good Fathers; it was really touching to see that vast crowd in such a state of grief. Let us thank God for that mission—how many souls would have remained dead in sin but for its help! I beg of you to offer for me, with your confessor's permission, the first Communion you make after the reception of this letter, for I know not how to thank our good God sufficiently for all the blessings He daily bestows upon me. Victoire [Leleu] sends love to all; she is well, and we are very happy; she always does her very best. . . Let good Father Leblanc read my letter, so that he may see once again what a poor ignorant woman the mother is. Everything affectionate to Mme. de Franssu;* how surprised she would be to see the way in which I trot about the streets of Abbeville!"

Here, as everywhere, Mère Julie spent herself for souls.

* Jeanne de Croquoison de la Cour du Fief, widow of the Marquis de Saint-Alyre-de-Franssu, put herself under Father Enfantin's direction at Amiens, and by his advice founded a congregation at Crest for the education of girls. The Mother-House of this Institute was later on transferred to Valence.

“Abbeville, August 2, 1804.

“My dear daughters,—However much I may wish to tell you the day of my return, I cannot do so, because the good God, as you know, likes me to grope my way along. Ah, blessed and praised be His holy name for all! By His grace I am ready for anything which shall turn to His greater glory. I put off writing to you for some days so that I might be able to tell you something certain; but I do not yet see my way clearly. *Deo gratias* always! Although I am but a very useless little servant, I may tell you that the days pass with astonishing rapidity. The good people of Abbeville leave me no time to be dull, I do not know which to listen to first. . . I bless God that all is prospering in the Community; the one thing I ask of Him is that you may love Him with all your hearts. See, when we love our good God, we do everything well, well; but when we do not love him, ah! talents and intellect go for nothing.

“I can find nothing to say to you, my dear daughters, but what the beloved disciple said: Love one another for the love of God, and God—oh, love Him above all things. It is a great comfort to me to learn that you are all in the peace of the Lord. Ah, it cannot be bought too dearly, that peace which we procure at the cost of a few little sacrifices. Yes! you will all taste

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of it, if you are filled with charity for each other, for everybody; if you are very faithful to your meditation, as I believe each one of you is; if you ask earnestly of our Lord the spirit of simplicity, of meekness, of mutual forbearance. The good God is expecting me at my meditation; so you will not be vexed if I leave you to go to Him, to my blessed Master. Oh, what a happy thing it is to love and serve Him, and how much He deserves our love! My God! why are not our hearts simply on fire with love for so good a Father? He knows how dearly I love you in Him, so pray to Him for your poor worthless mother; she needs your prayers so much! Above all, ask Him for humility."

Julie returned to Amiens a few days before the feast of the Assumption, rejoicing in the work accomplished and ready for fresh labours. But the enemy of souls, furious to see his empire so successfully attacked, did his utmost to undermine the work of the missions. The civil authorities, always jealous and despotic, and hostile to the missions from the first, published an order enjoining on the Fathers of the Faith to leave the Department of the Somme within the next twenty-four hours, under penalty of arrest. The greater number of them, therefore, left for the time being; a few, amongst whom were Fathers Thomas and

Enfantin, braved the danger, and kept themselves in hiding.

It is but fair to state that this petty persecution by the administrative power, the remains of the Revolutionary spirit, found no echo in the public voice. France was instinctively turning back to the Faith of her Fathers, and this revolution of feeling was strikingly witnessed to by the enthusiastic reception given to Pope Pius VII in 1804, a reception which touched the august pontiff deeply. "We passed through France" he said truly, "in the midst of a kneeling population."

CHAPTER VIII

*“The Company of the Glorious Virgin
Mary, our Lady”*

TO the daughters of the Blessed Julie Billiart, there came not only joy, but the sense of a holy fitness in the choice of the Church of the *Gesù* for the celebration of the solemn Roman Triduum in honour of her beatification.* It seemed the consecration, from her glory, of that ancient and blessed fellowship of the days of her infirmity, through which her Institute had been born, and to which it must ever look back with gratitude. For the names of three members of the Society of Jesus will always be enshrined in the heart's memory of Notre-Dame—that of Père Thomas, the confessor and director of Julie, Françoise Blin de Bourdon and the little group that first gathered round the bed of the paralytic; that of Père Varin, who had discerned and declared to her her apostolic vocation; that of Père Enfantin, the instrument of her miraculous cure.

For now ten years the first of these had been the friend and father of the little family. He had

* April 19, 20, 21, 1907.

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supported it in the days of tribulation, and, when these were past, had never ceased to busy himself with its interests. During the temporary suspension of the missions he and Père Enfantin had even turned their enforced leisure to the profit of the Institute by giving lessons to the young Sisters with a view to preparing them for the work of class-teaching.

The former Doctor of the Sorbonne was as kind as he was learned, and not only Christian doctrine, but history, grammar and arithmetic progressed merrily under his able and patient teaching. The Fathers found an admirable assistant in Françoise Blin de Bourdon. The class-equipment was primitive in the extreme, and professors and pupils often lacked the most indispensable apparatus. Many a time did Fathers Varin and Thomas chalk out the sums and geometrical problems on the floor.

But on September 10, 1805, Père Thomas left Amiens to take part in the Missions organized for the west and south, and was followed soon after by his energetic *confrère*, Père Enfantin. And so it came to pass that when Julie, on the interruption of her external works of zeal, set herself to give regular and stable form to her infant congregation, the task of guiding and assisting her in this important work devolved entirely upon Père Varin. His first care was its

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internal organization. Together with the Foundress he now traced a more extended draft of the Rule, and on July 2, the Feast of the Visitation, himself presented it to the Community. It was not yet, however, to be regarded as final, but was wisely to be submitted to the test of experience. It was therefore settled that every one should observe it with all possible perfection for the space of three months, so that any needful changes might suggest themselves naturally in the course of daily practice. But, though there have been additions, none of the fundamental articles of those first Constitutions have been changed; it was for them that the Blessed Foundress was to suffer the long persecution which was God's best benediction upon them, and they are the very nerve and sinew of the Constitutions solemnly approved by Gregory XVI in 1844.

Diocesan confirmation was given to them by Mgr. Jean François Demandolx, who, on the translation of Mgr. de Villaret to the see of Casale at the end of 1804, had exchanged the bishopric of La Rochelle for that of Amiens. At the expiration, therefore, of the term assigned, Julie Billiart, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, Victoire Leleu and Justine Garson made their profession in accordance with them in the hands of Père Varin. The two first had already, more than a year before, taken the vows of chastity and of devoting them-

selves to the religious instruction of the young; all now added those of poverty and obedience.

"I, N.N.,"—so runs the formula preserved to us in the handwriting of Sister Leleu—"promise unto God Almighty, before the Blessed Virgin, His Mother, and the whole court of heaven, and in presence of you, Father, holding the place of God, perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience, and, conformably to obedience, an especial care of the instruction of children, understanding the whole according to the Constitutions, the conditions and the arrangements which have been manifested to me at Amiens in the chapel of the House of Orphans, October 15, 1805."

Is that date a chance merely? One likes to think otherwise; to see in it the pledge of the presence in their midst of the great Saint of Carmel with whom Julie's large mind and loving heart had so much in common, and with whose daughters both she and Françoise Blin de Bourdon had been linked in holy friendship. To mark more completely their severance from the world, the four now changed their names. Julie took that of Sœur St-Ignace, thus clearly showing whose spirit she was obeying and making her own;* Françoise Blin de Bourdon was known from this time forward as Sœur St-Joseph, Victoire Leleu

* For prudence sake the name was never publicly adopted, and even in community was used only after the restoration of the Society of Jesus in 1814.

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became Sœur Anastasie, and Justine Garson Sœur St-Jean.

Cardinal Sterckx, Archbishop of Mechlin, used to say: "What is the Institute of Notre-Dame? I answer: It is a breath of the Apostolic Spirit fallen from the Heart of Jesus upon the heart of a woman who believed and who loved." Let us pause for a few moments to learn from the lips of Julie herself how she understood this apostolic spirit, and to study something of the life begun by our first Sisters that October in the Rue Neuve.

"One who enters our Society," the Foundress insisted, "must have far other intentions than to escape the dangers of the world. Our chief aim is the glory of God and the salvation of souls." Over and over again the phrase recurs in her Letters and her Conferences. "My dear Sisters, you are not made for yourselves alone; the principal end of our Institute is to propagate God's glory. Ah! how happy are you, dear Sisters, to be called to the office of the Apostles, nay, of Jesus Christ Himself."

For so great an end Julie must have great souls. "We want no common souls here. We must have souls of faith, able to sacrifice themselves; not turning perpetually around themselves, but occupied wholly with the interests of God's glory. Women's characters will never suit our Institute;

we need masculine characters which know no difficulty where the glory of God is concerned."

"Oh, my dear Sisters, you ought to be Seraphim and Cherubim, you ought to be souls who run after humiliations and crosses as a thirsty person to the waters."

How lofty is her own idea of her high vocation! "Ah! why are you not more generous towards God who has called you to so high a vocation? Who knows but that He gathered all of us together here to win Him one single soul? And would it not be a great thing to put one soul on the way of salvation—a soul which cost the Blood of God!"

But this apostolate depends for its efficacy on the inner life. The Sister of Notre-Dame must be both Martha and Mary, and her labours will bear fruit precisely in proportion to her union with God, her spirit of prayer. "If you do not become *souls of prayer*," the Blessed Mother constantly repeated, "our Institute will perish;" and a characteristic aphorism of hers has been handed down: *Courtes confessions, longues oraisons*. And so the Sister of Notre-Dame opens her day with an hour's meditation, made, as are all spiritual exercises in the Institute, in presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Then follows Mass. When the busy morning has run its course in class teaching or manual labour, the Angelus calls her

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to the mid-day Examen of a quarter of an hour. She does not, it is true, sing or say even the Little Office, save on Sundays and Festivals, but the Rosary, Spiritual Reading, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament with its solemn act of Reparation made daily by the assembled community, and, finally, another half-hour's meditation at the close of the day, are set as lamps and fountains along her daily path. Every year brings its eight days' Retreat, every month its First Friday's Recollection with its preceding adoration of the Holy Hour. But it is not merely that the day's routine is spaced out by fixed spiritual duties; rather Julie expects that prayer shall be the very atmosphere her children breathe. "If," she cried in one of her vigorous expressions, "I have not souls which *grapple themselves to the good God* with their whole heart, our Society will crumble away."

"The interior life," she explained, "does not consist in extraordinary things, but, chiefly, in union with Our Lord. Ah! believe me, if there is one thing to be desired upon earth it is that!"

Though reverencing all practices of devotion approved or permitted by the Church, she did not wish her daughters to multiply these. "I would put you on a broader road; what, for instance, I would counsel you, is to fill your day with ejaculatory prayer; that is a practice which helps the interior life."

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She recognizes the difficulty of this double life. "I have often said to you that our Institute is of all institutes the most difficult, because it must join a deep interior life to exterior occupations; and yet, if this interior spirit were lost, it could not subsist. The subjects would be mere seculars having the outward form of religious. . . . If our Sisters do not cultivate the interior spirit which keeps them united to our Lord in the midst of their outward occupations, they will never do anything of much worth. You need not be surprised that your children are sometimes so rebellious and headstrong, or make so little progress. Many a time it is the fault of their mistress' little union with God."

This union "is acquired by mortification and abnegation," but how well worth those hard words it is! "A true Sister of Notre-Dame, who lives in the holy Presence of God, shall, despite her multifold occupations, hear her God say to her: 'Arise, my beloved, come my dove, into the holes of the rock, into the clefts of the wall'; and then, my daughters, you will hide yourselves in spirit in the open wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ; you will enter into His Sacred Heart, that Heart in which all members of the Institute ought to fix their dwelling. In that Heart they will find a sure refuge in their troubles, strength against their weakness; from that Heart they shall draw zeal

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for souls at its purest source, and united to the Heart of Jesus they are certain to do solid good to souls, and to bring much glory to God."

"When I see you, dear Sisters, with that army of children, I say interiorly to God: 'Ah! Lord, give to our Sisters that interior spirit which shall keep them united with Thee while they teach these little ones.'"

Exteriorly, the life is simple and common. The perfect equality of rank among the Sisters of Notre-Dame powerfully promotes poverty of spirit. There is no distinction of Choir-Sister and Lay-Sister, and though, of course, offices are assigned according to the capacities and education of each, all join in certain manual works done in common. The Sister of Notre-Dame leads in its fullest sense that *Vita Communis* which is at once the greatest mortification and the greatest happiness.

A high ideal, truly, was Blessed Julie's for her daughters—a high ideal and difficult of attainment—put before them in all its austere strength, but with many a gracious word and phrase that softens its outline and sweetens its face. For on the first page of that Rule, delivered in outline to our first Sisters, meets them the fair and august figure of the Queen of Heaven, set up not only as their Advocate and Protectress, but as the Model whom they are to strive to copy. "Even as

the title *Company of Jesus*," Julie was wont to repeat, "means association with Jesus, whence it follows that one ought to say of a Jesuit: spirit of Jesus, virtue of Jesus, strength and power of Jesus; so the Sisters of Notre-Dame are the Company of Mary; hence in each member ought to be found the spirit of Mary, the virtue of Mary, the strength and power of Mary."

Julie attached great importance to the training of the Sisters destined for the schools, especially in all that concerned the teaching of Christian doctrine. In these early days she did not scruple even to shorten in their case the time allotted to prayer that they might have more to devote to this essential study. In her presence, and under her supervision, they became, by turns, teachers or pupils, repeating to each other her own inimitable lessons in catechism or Scripture history, or even her earnest conferences on religious life. Sister Anastasie Leleu kept delightful reminiscences of these "Criticism Lessons" at the Rue Neuve. At the evening recreation Mère Julie would say in her simple, bright fashion: "Look, daughter, just suppose that I am an old woman who comes to you for instruction; I have not been to my duties for forty years. Now, begin to teach me." "And we set to work," said Sister Anastasie, "with all simplicity; and Mère Julie answered, asked questions, and corrected; the

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lesson profited every one." She always urged the Sisters to precede their instruction of sinners by an earnest prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Blessed Virgin. "Go with them into the Sacred Heart," she would say, "and you will both of you come out converted." It is noteworthy that all the first Sisters thus formed immediately in the school of Blessed Julie were remarkable for the fruits they obtained by their catechetical instructions.

To profane studies also she would have her children devote themselves, under obedience, with whole-hearted energy. Not, of course, for their own sake; the Sister of Notre-Dame must look upon them but as nets wherein she may take souls and save them, and her esteem is to be not for these things nor for the success which may follow on them, but for "the simplicity of her holy vocation," wherein, like her blessed Mother, she is on fire with those two desires which are indissolubly connected, "to establish the kingdom of God in her own heart and to form Jesus Christ in the souls entrusted to her."

CHAPTER IX

First Foundations in Belgium

IT is needless to say that Julie herself was unanimously chosen as the first Mother General of the Institute. Her large and joyous spirit at once marked her government. Mère Blin de Bourdon has left it on record that, at the outset, she required very little; imposed, for instance, only two or three hours of silence a day, and did not even insist that things should always be done at the same hour, leading the Sisters "with great gentleness, like the children of a family."

Her keenest desire and her chiefest care was to form them to the true interior spirit, "without which," she says, "all is but dust borne away by the wind." She herself could now no longer, as at Cuvilly and Compiègne, spend long hours in uninterrupted prayer; but it filled, as we have seen, for all, its large appointed place in the day. The Sisters received Holy Communion two or three times a week according to the advice of their confessor, but Julie approached the altar every day, and nearly every day the Sacred Tribunal.

Drawn by her reputation for sanctity, novices

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soon flocked in; and when, in 1806, the number in the community reached eighteen, it became necessary to remove it to a larger house in the Faubourg-Noyon. Mme. de Franssu, a friend of Mère Blin de Bourdon's childhood whose name has already met us in these pages, together with a certain Sister Martha whom the Revolution had turned out of the Convent of her own Order, obtained leave to occupy rooms in the same building. On the other hand, there only remained now four orphans, as those already trained had been sent to situations. It was clear, too, that in the circumstances of the times the work of the schools was a much more important and fruitful thing, and the Foundress accordingly began to give a wider extension to this form of apostolate. Up to this time the Sisters had confined themselves to giving instruction in the Catechism, but now free classes were thrown open to the children of the poor. To fill the new schools, the Blessed Mother adopted St. Francis Xavier's expedient. She sent out into the surrounding streets a novice with a postulant, Adelaide Pelletier by name, who had begged the favour; the two went in different directions, each ringing a little bell and making aloud this delightfully simple proclamation: "We let you know that the Sisters of Notre-Dame have just opened free schools for little girls. Go and tell your parents the news." The plan was

thoroughly successful; as many as sixty children presented themselves on the first day, and the influx went on increasing steadily. For they felt instinctively, poor little things, that they were loved by these new teachers of theirs; loved with that solid and lasting affection which comes of seeing only immortal souls bought with the Precious Blood. Julie kept perpetually lifting up her Sisters in their labours to this light of faith; and she who had taught the poor, and rude and ignorant, from childhood upwards, was well fitted to inculcate the best way of dealing with the little ones; to urge on the young mistresses gentleness, and firmness, and peacefulness, and benignity, and great courtesy towards those "little souls" whom she had yearned over in the meadows round Cuvilly. "My daughters," she would say to them, "if you want your children to respect you, speak to them yourselves with respect. I beg this of you very earnestly; no sort of good can be done otherwise." And again: "We must go step by step in dealing with souls. We must follow the spirit of the good God, a spirit of patience, of long, long patience. Have we not ourselves been the objects of it?"

Julie herself did her share of teaching, and as far as possible kept the explanation of the Catechism in her own hands. And, as of old, so attractive was it on her lips that even the other religious

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establishments in Amiens would send their pupils to the lessons of *la Bonne Mère*. Mother Mary Teresa, the Carmelite already quoted, gives us the impression left on their minds. "Mère Julie's special *attrait*," she says, "was the religious instruction of the poor. The good mother's face wore an expression of affability which never left it. She was always even-tempered, always sincerely humble. She used often to talk to us about vanity, about dress. . . . She never scolded, never reproached us. . . . She used to say: 'In the matter of prayer nothing is small, nothing.' And in order the better to fix our attention when we were saying the Our Father, she would make a pause after each petition. So complete had been her cure that she never sat down while she taught."*

In the community, fervour and self-abnegation grew apace. Extreme poverty reigned in the house. The food was that of the very poor: for breakfast, dry bread and water; for dinner, soup and a dish of vegetables, except on Sundays when there was a little meat. Even so it was necessary to keep an eye on the more fervent, lest they should retrench on what was barely sufficient. The dormitory was constructed by running up partitions in the attic; palliasses laid on the floor were the beds.

After the blessed Foundress, the very servant of

* Letter of Rev. Mother Boistel de Belloy. *Process. de Fama*.



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the Servants of Christ, the lowliest and least in the house was Mère St-Joseph, and those same streets of Amiens which had so often seen her roll by in her brilliant equipage now saw her many a time trudging back from the market, clad in the garb of a poor woman, not seldom too short for her, and laden with the provisions for the day's meal.

Such a life was beautiful in the eyes of God, and He blessed it abundantly. By the end of the year 1806 the community reckoned thirty members, a number which entitled it to civil recognition. On June 19, in fact, an Imperial decree was signed at St-Cloud, granting to the new Institute a provisional approbation, and we find this confirmed by a second document, dated from the camp at Osterode, March 10, 1807.

And now the moment had come for Julie to send forth labourers into other fields. While the first clouds were gathering of a storm which was ultimately to drive her and her daughters from her native France, the gentle Providence of her "good God" drew them to that hospitable soil of Belgium, destined to become the second birthplace of the Institute and to fill its ranks with so many of those strong and sterling characters moulded after the very heart of the Foundress.

The Amiens College of the Fathers of the Faith had been transferred from the Oratory to the Faubourg-Noyon, and was governed in 1805 by Père

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Leblanc, who had succeeded Père Bruson. To him, then, on leaving Amiens shortly after drawing up the Rule, Père Varin committed the care of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. In the month of July, 1806, it happened that Père Leblanc went to make the official inspection of the College of the Fathers of the Faith at Roulers, between Bruges and Courtrai. He invited Julie to accompany him, and she, hoping for some chance of helping souls, gave a ready consent. Thus it came about that she was presented to the Bishop of Ghent, Mgr. Fallot de Beaumont, who at once asked her to make a foundation in his diocese. But Julie was not one to *brusquer* the work of God, and she answered with true apostolic prudence that she would do so when she should have found suitable subjects speaking Flemish, and if, when these were found, she were first allowed full time to form them as religious and to train them as class-teachers. The wise conditions were accepted, and so well did the good Bishop fulfil his part of the agreement, that August 28 saw the Foundress once more on the road to Flanders to receive the postulants he had recruited for her. The first of these was one whose name is dear to the Institute—Marie Steenhaut—the charming and saintly “Sister Marie,” to whose pen we owe the first Annals of the Institute.

The girl was awaiting Julie at the episcopal

palace, and, after the introduction, was eager in her turn to present her new mother to her parents. On their way Julie entered the parish church for a few moments' prayer. "One of my sisters," relates Sister Marie in her *Memoirs*, "whom she did not know at all, was praying there, and our Mother knelt behind her. She came out with us, and made acquaintance on the road. Mère Julie told her that she also would one day be her daughter, and when I was alone with her she said to me that God had given her special lights on the future of this child." A year before this prediction Ciska was praying in church when she suddenly beheld the altar surrounded by a dazzling light, and heard a voice distinctly say to her, "Be faithful to Me, you will be a religious." Nothing at that time was further from her thoughts; a strong temptation was, in fact, drawing her in an entirely opposite direction. Ciska Steenhaut will meet us more than once in the course of our narrative.

The Steenhauts were an excellent Christian family, worthy of receiving a saint beneath their roof. As Julie crossed the threshold, Mme. Steenhaut, herself a person of great piety, was seized with an impression of the deepest veneration, as if, she was wont afterwards to say, she had beheld in her a second St. Theresa. Sending for her other daughters, Ciska among them, "My dear

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Mother," she said, leading them up to her, "I have such perfect confidence in you that I give you not only my eldest, but also, if God be pleased to call them to the religious life, my three younger ones."

From Ghent Mère Julie, accompanied by Marie Steenhaut, passed on to Courtrai, where she was hospitably welcomed by two other families, the Vercruysses and the Goethals, in which faith and good works were, and still are, traditional. In the house of the latter, little Thérèse Goethals, a charming child of six, received the blessing and embrace of the holy Foundress, and with them—so, at least, she always believed—the germ of her future vocation to the Institute, which she was to govern as its third Superior General.* It was Mère Ignace Goethals who sent the first Sisters of Notre-Dame to America.

The Foundress began at once to exercise her new daughter in obedience and opposition to the spirit of the world, and Sister Marie tells one or two amusing incidents of the Courtrai visit. When Julie went into the house of her hostess, "she made me sit down at the stall of a woman who was selling fruit, and bought from her some pears, which she told me to eat with the bread which she took out of her bag. To eat thus in the street was my first humiliation. I kept fancying that

* Postulatory Letter of Mgr. Goethals, S.J., Archbishop of Calcutta, and nephew of the Reverend Mère Ignace.



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among the passers-by were persons come from Ghent to the fair then going on at Courtrai. Next day our Mother took me to High Mass, and on the way she was more than once jeered at by the boys on account of her somewhat singular travelling costume; they greeted her as 'witch,' 'black sorceress,' etc. She made me translate these titles into French for her, and laughed heartily over them. Not so I; indeed, so humbled did I feel, that when we entered the church I let her go on in front and knelt at a distance from her. She did not notice this till we were leaving the church, when she asked me the reason. I confessed my pride, and she was pleased with my sincerity; but she spoke to me about humility in a way which deepened my esteem for her, and I was stronger in the subsequent tests to which she put me."*

The next station was Roulers, where the Servant of God received two other postulants; she took up a fourth at St-Genois, and a fifth joined her from the neighbourhood of Liège. And now the fervent little band turned their faces towards Amiens, beginning their noviceship during the long journey. Julie poured her spirit freely into the fresh and eager hearts, prayed with them, explained to them the aim and object of the Congregation, spoke to them of the joy of labouring for the salvation of souls.

* *Memoirs of Sister Marie Steenhaut.*

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During the three weeks of her absence she wrote from time to time to the Amiens community:

“Ghent, September 1, 1807.

“I assure you, my dear good daughters, that all your hearts are always quite close to my own. Oh! what am I saying? No, no; I only want them all in order to place them continually in the Divine and Adorable Heart of our sweet and loving Jesus. See, my dear Jesus, here are all the hearts of my sisters. Oh, yes; they are much better than mine, sweet Saviour; but Thou wilt let mine slip in amongst them, wilt Thou not?

“How happy we are to belong to God with our whole hearts! Even as I write I cannot keep back my tears, when I see my God so little known, so little loved. Ah! my dear children, let the good God fashion your hearts as He wills by His grace; show your greatness of soul by forgetting yourselves, to think only of the interests of God alone. Let us do our best to put our hearts into that state which shall procure Him all the glory which He looks for from us. Let us think of nothing but gaining souls for our Jesus. What do not the lovers of the world do daily to get followers? And we, shall we do nothing for our Blessed Master and Lord? . . . There! you shall have no details of my journey; I look upon all that as trifles compared with speaking of the dear Master whom we

have the honour to serve. Pray a great deal for me. I want very earnestly to return to you better; I feel that it needs all your charity to support me, with the innumerable faults you must perceive in me. I do not know when I shall get back to you. My God wills that I should always go along like a little blind woman: He likes that; well, then! so must I."

A week later Julie writes:

"So our good Mère Blin tells me everything is going on as well as possible; blessed be God's holy Name! Ah! my dear good daughters, let us daily become more interior, so that we may serve our divine Master better, that we may serve Him in spirit and in truth. I shall find you all saints, shall I not? when I get home. May our dearest Jesus live in the hearts of all my good daughters, and in that of their poor Mère Julie."

Hardly had she confided the little troop of Belgian postulants to the care of Mère Blin de Bourdon, when Julie was again recalled to Flanders by Mgr. de Beaumont to arrange for the establishment of a school at St-Nicolas, a town of some commercial importance in the district known as the Pays de Waes, between Ghent and Antwerp. At Ghent, Marie Steenhaut's young sister Francesca, or "Ciska," was awaiting her, ready to fulfil the

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prediction of a few months ago. The good Bishop sent round his own carriage to fetch her, and then a pretty little scene took place. Julie and Ciska knelt for the prelate's blessing; he laid one hand on the head of the Blessed Servant of God, the other on the bright hair of the girl, and said: "Mother, behold your daughter; daughter, behold your mother." They arose and embraced, and there passed into Ciska's heart so strong an affection for the mother thus given to her, "that nothing in the world," she said, "could have separated me from her."

Mère Julie was obliged to wait some days for the person who was to introduce her to the clergy and civil authorities of St-Nicolas; she profited by the delay in her own way.

"I must tell my daughters a little secret; it is that this time of waiting gains me happy moments with my good God. As much as I can, I stay in the Bishop's chapel. I am there with the good God and all my dear daughters. I give them all to Him, one after another, and I hope that they in their turn see in God's presence their poor little mother in the adorable Heart of her good Jesus—how sweet it is to make our dwelling there! For the love of God, let us never leave It; let us live there by love, let us die there of love, each and all of us."

On reaching St-Nicolas she found plenty to be done. The house offered to the Sisters was spacious, indeed, but terribly out of repair. Popularly known as *den Berkenboom*, it had formerly been a school, under the patronage of Saint Joseph and taught by a congregation of Philippine nuns. Two of these, worn out by age and labour, still lingered on, striving to suffice for a class of some fifty-two pupils; but they were glad enough to transfer the heavy task to younger hands. The town authorities, on their side, promised to remedy the insanitation of the premises, and Julie hastened back to Amiens to choose the little band of missionaries who were to be the first alike to leave Amiens and to enter the land which God was to give to Notre-Dame for inheritance and where she was to prolong her days in peace. Sister Marie Steenhaut was, naturally, of the number; she was to take charge of the Flemish class. To her were joined Sister Xavier (Josephine Evrard) and two Belgian novices who were to follow a little later. The government of the new community was entrusted to Sister St-Jean (Justine Garson), one of the first four professed, a religious whom the Foundress cherished with special affection, and whom she would still continue to form and guide by a long series of strong and tender letters.

Once again, by sweet and seemly coincidence,

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this new development in the life of the Institute is united to a feast of Mary. Our Lady of the Snow, the Purification, the Visitation, had consecrated respectively the foundation of the first house of Notre-Dame, the first vows, the delivery of a definite Rule; the evening of the Immaculate Conception, 1807, blessed the first partings of the Sisters. It was a scene touching in its significant simplicity. With full heart Julie said aloud Our Lord's own prayer for His Apostles: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we also are one,' and that they may remain ever one with the common centre," and then all in turn knelt to kiss the feet of those who were to carry the Gospel of Peace to the little ones of Flanders.

On the morrow the three set out, led by Julie herself. Each carried with her the religious habit—hitherto no distinctive costume had been adopted—a black dress of common woollen stuff, a white linen coif under a stiff black bonnet, and a white linen wimple. The black veil which completes the habit was at first worn only in chapel; out of doors was added a long black hooded mantle almost touching the ground. It was the garb seen by the Servant of God in the vision at Compiègne, and tradition tells that these first habits were found by the wondering Sisters ready for them without their labour, fashioned accord-

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ing to the pattern shown to their Mother on the mountain.

Arrived at Ghent—not without mishap, for their coach broke down twice—they went straight to the Bishop's palace, and it was here that, after it had been blessed by him, the Sisters first joyfully clothed themselves in the livery of Holy Poverty.

The Foundress remained two months at St-Nicolas in order to set everything on a proper footing. Her own strong desire was that all the day schools should be free, but she found herself obliged to yield to the representations made to her on this score, and to consent that the children of well-to-do parents should pay a fee proportioned to their means; but for the Poor School she would not hear of it. The beginnings augured happily, and Julie writes full of gratitude on December 16:

“Why can we not publish to all the world how good is the good God? Our Sisters look charming in their little costume; every one is pleased with it. They are well received everywhere. The school will open to-morrow with the *Veni Creator* and the Mass of the Holy Ghost. I have earnestly begged that it might be publicly announced in the Church that the Poor School is free. I am very firm on this point.”

On the next day she writes:

"I must tell you that we have had a great feast in our school to-day. Ninety children sat down to table. We gave them tea with milk in it, and little penny cakes, and the children had a play-day. The Dean and the Administrators were delighted to see this large family. If there were no crosses in the midst of all this, I should not hope for much good from it. The cross is the hall-mark set on all works which tend to the greater glory of God, and He never leaves His dear children without it. May Jesus live in all our hearts at St-Nicolas and everywhere. Beg of Him that I may make Him loved by His creatures, and that I myself may love Him so much as to die of love."

The Amiens community sends her its New Year's greeting; Julie's answer is sweet as a page from Saint Francis de Sales.

"I wish you all those things which will best please the Heart of our good Jesus: that you may all become faithful servants of that Lord to whom we are consecrated—our body, our soul, our mind, everything in us ought *to be Jesus*. Oh, my daughters, how sweet it is to die every moment to our own life so as to let only the spirit of our loving Jesus live in us.

"But the life of Jesus in us requires that we

should all become like Him—gentle, patient, charitable, forbearing. Yes, love Him, my good Sister Sophie; love Him, my good Sister Frances, and with a generous love which breaks through all obstacles; love Him, my good Sister Geneviève, set yourself to work in earnest. Courage, my good little Eulalie, courage; you will see how good the good God is. As for Sister Theresa, she appears to make only material bread; but she knows better; in making it she is feeding her soul with another food. Sister Firmine is going this year to acquire a simplicity which will be the delight of the adorable Heart of our dear and good Jesus. My good Sister Angélique will now always be with the angels at the foot of the altar. My little Sister Scholastica will grow quite childlike in our Lord in the company of her little pupils; let her remember to offer them every day to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. And our good Sister Catherine, with all her family, she has a work to do to form Jesus in those young hearts. She must form Him first in herself by a great courage, so as to become a manly soul. As for the others, Sisters Clotilde, Marianne, Séraphine, all that have come, all that are to come, may my Jesus ever live in their hearts.”

The Sisters of Notre-Dame, then, were in Belgium; and before Julie is back again in France,

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the name of *Namur*—dear to Notre-Dame as that of Annecy to the Sisters of the Visitation—has crossed her life. While she was in Ghent she received a letter from the distinguished prelate who then governed the diocese of Namur, inviting her to confer with him on her way back to Amiens about a foundation in his episcopal city. The bishop who was to prove so staunch a friend to the Institute in its bitter day of need, deserves from its biographer something more than a passing mention.

Charles Francis Joseph Pisani, Baron de la Gaude, was a native of Aix in Provence—the last scion of a noble house which had given two Doges to Venice, and the inheritor of a splendid fortune. He was already thirty years of age when he exchanged his magistrate's robes for the soutane. Appointed to the sees first of St-Paul-trois-Châteaux and then of Vence, everything—his illustrious birth, his episcopal character and the holiness of his life—designated him as a mark for the fury of the Revolution, and he was cited before its tribunal. He succeeded, however, in fleeing to Rome, and there published his celebrated *Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Vence on Obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff*. In 1804, after the Concordat, he was named Bishop of Namur, and at once gained both the veneration and the affection of his flock. Julie's name had reached his



MONSEIGNEUR PISANI DE LA GAUDE

Bishop of Namur, 1804-1826

From an Oil Painting in possession of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Namur

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ears through the Fathers of the Faith, possibly also through Mgr. de Beaumont. She left Ghent for Namur in a bitter January, and what with bad weather and bad roads only reached it after some days of comfortless travel. It was night when, numb with cold and drenched to the skin by the falling sleet, the Servant of God knocked at the door of the Bishop's palace, and she who urged one of her daughters to "eat heartily of the solid bread of privations" must have blessed God when the man servant roughly bade her go elsewhere. She was turning humbly away, when Mgr. Pisani himself appeared upon the scene, and welcomed her with the utmost hospitality and kindness. He retained her as his guest for three days, and it was settled that the projected foundation should be made in the following summer. She was back at Amiens on February 4, 1807. But it did not keep her long. Père Leblanc, when Napoleon's project of the University of France rendered probable the foundation of a Government *lycée* at Amiens, had transferred the college of the Fathers of the Faith to the town of Montdidier. Here he was assisted in his educational labours by two warm admirers of the Servant of God, the celebrated Père Sellier, and a certain Abbé Trouvelot, who was to be her counsellor at more than one difficult moment, and who, when she had passed away, was to manifest his admiration of her virtue

by going to Cuvilly to gather the souvenirs of her contemporaries. When, then, there was question of giving to the poor also of Montdidier the benefit of a Christian education, which the expulsion of the Sisters of Charity by the Revolution had deprived them of ever since 1792, these strongly advised an appeal to the Sisters of Notre-Dame. The Mayor generously supported the proposal, and Julie accepted it.

On February 21 she took with her, to start the new foundation, Sister Catherine Daullée and Sister Angélique Bicheron, niece to the Canon of that name who, with M. Louis Sellier, had founded the College at Amiens which they afterwards ceded to the Fathers of the Faith. But, in the providence of God, it was not only for the poor little children of Montdidier, who, from the first day, filled the classes to overflowing, that this journey was undertaken. It gave Julie the opportunity of laying before Père Leblanc certain points touching the government and direction of her Institute, and fortified her with his wise counsels for the combat it was about to encounter. Did she, when she asked them, already foresee the long and bitter persecution through which she was now to pass? One can hardly think otherwise, in reading the following lines written from Montdidier to Mère Blin de Bourdon:

“All for the greater glory of God! let us desire nothing but that. Leave alone, leave alone all the rest, all sensible support. God alone more than ever! He is our only helper when all others abandon us. Never have I understood better how frail is the support of creatures. Oh, how good a thing it is to lean upon Him who alone is unchangeable! Let us cast all our care upon Him—confidence, love, total abandonment into the hands of so good a Father. The good God—He is our strength, our support.”

CHAPTER X

The Beginning of Sorrows

WE have seen that when Père Varin left Amiens he bequeathed the care of the Sisters of Notre-Dame to Père Leblanc, then Rector of the College. At the same time he appointed as their confessor one of the professors, who already filled the same office at the convent of the Dames du Sacré Cœur, the Abbé de Sambucy de Saint-Estève. Mgr. Baunard, in his *Life of the Venerable Madame Barat*, describes him as "still young, enterprising and absolute in his notions, a man of letters and gifted with a brilliant imagination, but whose character was restless and changeable." Such a temperament—unballasted, moreover, by that common sense which is often a more valuable quality than superior intellect—strikes one as eminently unfitted for the delicate functions of Spiritual Director to a newly-founded Institute; and we are surprised that a man of Père Varin's prudence and discernment, and who, as his superior, must have been well aware of the Abbé's defects, should have made such a choice. Possibly he judged that as confessor merely he would have

no scope for meddling with external matters; or he may have relied on the firm hand of Père Leblanc to keep the Abbé within bounds. In any case his previsions were completely at fault. At a later period Père de Sambucy nearly ruined the Congregation of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart and caused much suffering to the gentle Mère Barat; to Julie Billiart he was the instrument of the longest and bitterest trial of her life. Her biographer would gladly throw a veil over the painful events we are going to record, but we owe it to truth and justice to speak. We owe it, too, to the honour of the Servant of God; for men are but instruments in His hands, and the cross is the chisel wherewith He fashions His elect to the likeness of His Son. "I do not see," said M. Trouvelot, who was an eyewitness of all that passed, "how anyone who writes Mère Julie's life could pass over in silence the wrongs done to her by M. de Sambucy and by the Bishop of Amiens at his instigation." *

The dispersion of the Fathers of the Faith left the Abbé almost alone at Amiens; he at once profited by the situation. His ruling idea was to shape the new Congregation to the model of the ancient monastic institutes, and the changes he contemplated in view of this design struck at the very root of what Mère Julie was wont to call

* Letter to the Abbé Belfroy of Namur.

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the *esprit primitif*. He would have no Superior General, no connexion between the different houses, no extension of the Institute beyond the single diocese of Amiens. As simple confessor he had, of course, no authority to modify rules and constitutions which had received episcopal sanction; he was, moreover, fully aware that his notions were in direct contradiction to those of Fathers Varin and Leblanc. His frequent insinuations had, in fact, been of no avail in prejudicing Julie's first superior against her. "Mother," Père Varin often said to her, "since God has put you in the position you occupy, you have grace to act; do not tie yourself to asking so many permissions of M. de Sambucy; if you consult him, let it be as a friend merely. Whatever confidence I may have in him for other things, it is not to him that I look to give your daughters the spirit they should have in order to enter into the designs of Our Lord; and if he is not to give the spirit, neither is he to preserve or perfect it. No, that task Our Lord has committed to the good Mother." He speaks in the same strain in many of the letters quoted by Mère Saint-Joseph in her *Memoirs*. "I am going to write to this good M. de Sambucy, to let him know in a friendly way what, in my opinion, is the line of conduct he should pursue, and to put him on his guard against the love of change even under pretext of improvement. I have given

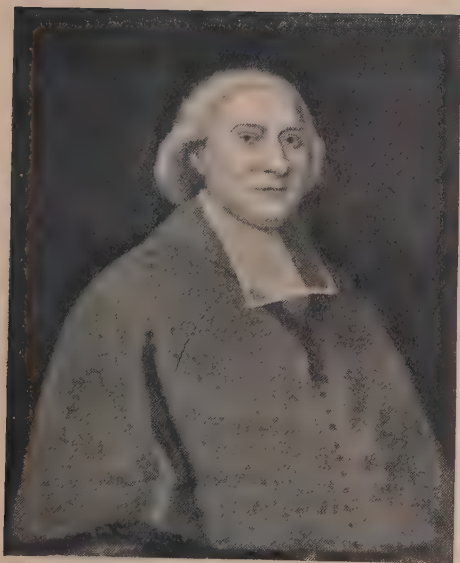
him several bits of advice which were not very flattering to him, but which were intended to establish the rights of the Mother over her daughters."* After this it is somewhat surprising that Père Varin did not remove the root of the evil by appointing another confessor. But the Abbé enjoyed the confidence of the Bishop, and his removal would doubtless have been a difficult matter.

On her side the Foundress could not in conscience yield to requirements which involved nothing short of the ruin of the spirit, scope and organization of her Institute. But, firm as she was in resisting innovations which were contrary both to the divine inspiration and to the instructions of Père Varin, the contradictions she had to endure planted in her heart no root of bitterness, wrung from her lips no complaining word; and she required from her daughters the same charity. "His intentions are good," she used to say; "leave all to God. M. de Sambucy has excellent qualities, but he is not the right man in the right place. Let us humble ourselves and wait. God holds all the events of life in His hands, and can make those which to us seem the most vexatious turn to His greater glory." And M. de Lamarche, who knew her thoroughly, wrote later the following testimony to her virtue during this period: "She set

* *Memoirs of Mère Blin de Bourdon*, vol. 1, p. 95.

her daughters the example of every virtue, giving out wherever she went the good odour of Christ. It was enough to see her and to speak with her to be convinced that the spirit of God ruled her thoughts, her sentiments, her whole conduct. God made her pass through great trials; her projects were thwarted and opposed. But though she deplored all the cavilling of which she was the object, she never lost the peace of her soul; she was always watchful over herself, and never spoke to her ecclesiastical superiors but with the most profound respect."

The smouldering displeasure of the confessor first broke forth on the occasion of Julie's visit to Flanders. His opposition to the foundation of St-Nicolas was, however, forced to give way before the authority of his own Superior, Père Leblanc, nor could he prevent the consequent arrangements made by the Servant of God for fresh foundations, and for the regular visitation of the branch houses thus established. But one thing he successfully did. He managed to prejudice against her the minds of the ecclesiastical authorities, and on her return to Amiens she was met with undeserved reproaches and rebukes—accepted, after the fashion of the saints, in silence. Mgr. Demandolx was a man of warm heart and real virtue; but he was highly impulsive and easily influenced, and M. de Sambucy had no



Mgr. DEMANDOLX, BISHOP OF AMIENS

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difficulty in getting him to accept his statements and adopt his views without personal inquiry. Moreover, the brain disease which was to prove ultimately fatal to him, was already making its first stealthy inroads upon a system worn out by the solitudes of a vast diocese, doubled by the difficulties of the times. In such a temperament impressions rapidly received under one influence were as rapidly replaced by absolutely contrary ones under another; and in moments of nervous tension or excitement the Bishop gave way to ungovernable fits of anger.

These facts must be borne in mind in estimating a line of conduct which might otherwise seem as unwarrantable as inexplicable; and they render yet more striking the witness which, when the mists of prejudice had been dispelled, Mgr. Demandolx bore to the heroic virtue which he had so severely tried.

It was quite another matter to influence Mère St-Joseph, and M. de Sambucy soon saw that, if he was to carry through his projects of reform, he must separate the Foundresses. An opportunity soon offered. It will be remembered that Julie had promised the foundation of Namur for the summer. The imperial sanction had been obtained, and the Bishop had seen and approved the list of Sisters selected to constitute the new community, when, on the very eve of their departure, the Abbé

arrived at the Rue Neuve with a counter-order appointing Mère Blin de Bourdon superior in place of the Sister named by the Mother General. Humanly speaking, nothing worse could have happened. The Servant of God was to be deprived of her chief counsel and support at a moment when the fate of the Institute hung in the balance. But their prudence and their counsel were in the good God, even as was their trust; they obeyed without a word, and Mère Blin de Bourdon did not even allow herself time to take leave of her family.

M. de Sambucy's next step was to obtain control of the temporal resources. There was a small capital in hand, derived partly from a gift made to Julie by Mme. de Franssu, partly from the sale of some property belonging to Mère Blin. The sum was destined for the purchase of a larger house, but the Abbé demanded the loan of the whole of this money that the Ladies of the Sacred Heart might be enabled to acquire possession of the Maison de l'Oratoire, which, so far, they had only rented. No word was said about the payment of interest, and no security was given save a written receipt. Furthermore, M. de Sambucy obliged Mère Blin de Bourdon to give him the entire control of her income during her absence, and he decided that the whole of it should be settled on the single house at Amiens. This measure left the



· FIRST HOUSE OCCUPIED BY BLESSED JULIE AT NAMUR ·

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Mothers without any funds for the new foundation.

One more move completed the Abbé's strategy. He drew from the Bishop a final order that Julie herself should accompany Mère St-Joseph to Namur, and should thence pass to Bordeaux to meet the wishes of Mgr. d'Aviau, who was anxious to affiliate to the Sisters of Notre-Dame one of the religious congregations in his city. And so, in the heroism of obedience, and the peace that goes with it, these two left Amiens on the last day of June, 1807. M. de Sambucy walked a few steps with them; his parting words to the Servant of God left no possibility of doubt as to his intentions in her regard: "Mère Julie, you have finished your business here, you can now go and do it elsewhere." And if some prudential regard for Mère Blin's position as temporal Foundress of the Institute prevented him from addressing her in direct terms, both felt that she was virtually included in the dismissal.

The first house of the Institute at Namur stands at the junction of the Rue du Séminaire with the Rue de l'Évêché, and is now occupied by the diocesan seminarists. Hither, on July 7, came the little party of four—the two Mothers, Sister Xavier, whom they had taken up at St-Nicolas, and a Sister Elizabeth from the Rue Neuve. So thoughtfully had Mgr. Pisani provided for all

their needs that, as Mere St-Joseph said, "not even a match was wanting," and Julie pours forth her gratitude on the following day in a letter to the community at Amiens.

"J. M. J.

"Namur, July 8, 1807.

"May our good Jesus and His Blessed Mother live in all our hearts!

"My dear Sisters and good Daughters in our Lord,—It is only half-past three in the morning, but I cannot put off giving you some news of our arrival, so that we may all unite in blessing the merciful goodness of the good God towards us. We were received by the Bishop with every mark of kindness. He made us take our supper in his palace, and honoured us with his presence during it. How good the good God is, my dear daughters; and what thanks we owe Him for vouchsafing to be mindful of His poor servants! 'Leave all, and you shall find all,' says *The Following of Christ*. Our two Sisters are very happy, and bless God with all their hearts. They thought the house very nice, if anything too nice. How good is the good God! Now, then, courage! a manly sort of courage, my daughters, which no difficulty can scare! if God is for us, who shall be against us?—a profound humility, an obedience without a thought of self, a confidence so strong

that not all the demons in hell can trouble or shake it. . . . Remember always, I beg of you, that virtue is made strong in infirmity; the more faults we see in ourselves, the more eagerly we ought to take them to the adorable Heart of our Saviour Jesus."

The letter added an injunction to send a reply to it as soon as received; but day followed day, and letter followed on letter, without bringing any answering word, and anxiety grew in Julie's heart. At last, on July 23, Père Leblanc appeared at Namur, with tidings which explained the long silence, and which must have surpassed her worst forebodings. The good Father was no longer Superior of the convent in the Rue Neuve; M. de Sambucy had been substituted by the Bishop on the very day after the Foundresses had left; the correspondence was in all probability intercepted. The gravity of the situation was apparent in the Father's concluding words: "My dear Mother, at this moment you have no more authority than myself in your house at Amiens."

Julie once wrote to one of her spiritual children: "Souls of faith are unshaken by all the events of life. We must accustom ourselves to see everything in God—then all goes well, and the soul rests on the bosom of her Father. Let us love, love, love Him, my daughter, and repose in the

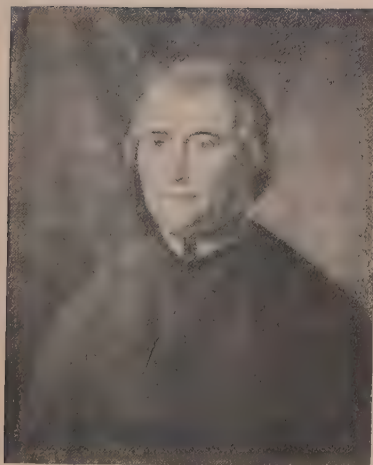
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care of His immutable Providence." As she counselled, so did she; she agreed with Père Leblanc to take no action, but to pray and wait, leaving her cause in God's hands.

At Namur the condition of things was a compensation and a contrast. The Poor School was opened, and the Sisters at once, here even more visibly than elsewhere, won the affection and confidence of their little scholars. In the interior of the community the spiritual life was ensured by the appointment as confessor of M. Minsart, vicar of the church of St. John the Evangelist and, a former Bernardine of the Abbey of Boneffe, a man fitted by his warm heart and apostolic spirit to understand Julie's Institute, and by his prudence and his counsel to guide its members. He became a staunch friend to both mother and daughters.

Seeing that essentials were thus satisfactorily established, the Servant of God prepared to fulfil the second part of her obedience and go on to Bordeaux.

In the community-room of the present Mother House at Namur hangs an oil-painting of the Descent of the Holy Ghost, without much artistic merit, but dear in the traditions of Notre-Dame. For standing beneath it on the eve of Julie's departure, Mère St-Joseph, whose heart, dreading the long journey for her mother and for herself



THE ABBÉ MINSART
From an Old Painting

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the responsibilities of superiority, had been for some days heavy with anxious forebodings, chanced to cast her eyes upon it. Immediately her soul was filled with the comfort and peace of the Spirit, and as she embraced the blessed Servant of God she said to her with a confidence that was prophetic: "Good-bye, *Ma Mère*; you will come back to die at Namur."

On August 5, the fourth anniversary of the foundation of her Institute, Julie reached Bordeaux; she was received with marked esteem by its holy bishop. His project was, as has been said, to fuse with the Institute of Notre-Dame a pious congregation which was devoting itself to the education of youth in his diocese. Mme. Vincent, its Superior, was a remarkable woman, and the Servant of God found the community of Ste. Eulalie in a fervent and thoroughly healthy condition, so that the proposed affiliation was easily and speedily effected. On September 8 Mgr. d'Aviau was able to clothe in our Lady's livery eighteen new subjects, and not long after a second convent was founded in the district of Les Chartrons. When Julie left Bordeaux, the number of poor children in the two schools had reached seven hundred. A letter, quaintly addressed to "Madame St-Joseph, Schoolmistress, near the Episcopal Palace at Namur," gives the details.

“May our good Jesus ever live in our hearts
and in all hearts!

“My dear, good Friend,—At last I am in this famous Bordeaux which we have talked so much about. The Sisters here received me with the greatest charity. There are eighteen or twenty of them, all in excellent dispositions, wishing to serve Our Lord as perfectly as they can in the person of His poor children. These children are very numerous; it was warm work going from class to class embracing them all. There are altogether three hundred, Mme. Vincent tells me. She is a woman of great merit and strong good sense. I hope our union will bring much glory to our Blessed Master. I am longing for news from you. Have you any more children in your poor school? Now that I see so many at Bordeaux, I should like to go all round the world to snatch these poor little creatures from the grasp of Satan, and to teach them what their souls are worth. The little girls here are very quiet; not a word is to be heard in their large, crowded schoolrooms. The mistresses speak little and in a low tone, and they all use *signals*, as we do at Amiens. I beg of you, my dear daughters, not to get into the habit of speaking too loud.

“I cannot say more to-day; I am obliged to call on the Prefect and on the Mayor; all this takes up time. This is my penance—we must each



FORDEAUX

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do our share. Pray that my sins, my innumerable infidelities, may not hinder the work of God. When I think that all founders of Orders have been Saints, and I am nothing but an infamous sinner. . . . O my God, have pity on me in Thy great mercy. Oh! I shall fly back to you as soon as my good God allows me. No news yet from Amiens. You will understand what a sacrifice this is for my heart."

Mère St-Joseph answered:

"The long-wished-for letter from Bordeaux was received with much consolation. It tells us you have arrived safely, and that you have eighteen grown-up daughters and three hundred children. That looks like a full-fledged brood, which will not long need its mother. She must haste back to her chicks that are still without feathers. . . . God in His infinite goodness has allowed me to feel convinced that you will return here for a very long stay. Whether it be so or no, my weakness needed the comfort which this hope gives me."

Both, indeed, needed to be singularly settled in hope, for September and October wore away, and no word either to Namur or Bordeaux broke the silence at Amiens. "Our path has been marked out for us," writes Julie; "let us walk along it bravely,

through the briars and the thorns, remembering that Jesus, our dear Master, goes before us. Let it be said that He has at least some little servants on earth who are entirely devoted, entirely consecrated to Him. . . . My heart is intensely tried just now. I have not heard a word from Amiens. I have written them four letters, and nothing comes. I offer this in the best way I can to our Lord."

Her old friend Père Thomas is as puzzled as she is; M. Joseph—the name by which she is obliged to designate Père Varin at this time, when he was being closely, though secretly, watched by the imperial police—is pressing her to return; Père Leblanc urges the same thing. When, at the beginning of November, Mgr. Demandolx himself, "our good and holy Prelate," wrote paternally, "Return, return, my daughter, as soon as obedience allows you," it seemed that the wind had turned, and Mère Julie set out on November 12, 1807.

We must now go back to Amiens to explain what had happened during her absence. No sooner had Julie and Françoise left than M. de Sambucy went straight to the convent, assembled the community, and, in the Bishop's name, appointed as Superior Sister Thérèse Boutrainghan, to be called henceforth "Mère Victoire." He changed the names and the offices of the other Sisters, made new regulations, established new customs,

and gave it to be understood that the absence of the Foundresses would be indefinitely prolonged. All letters to or from the convent passed through his hands and were intercepted at his discretion. The poor Sisters, in a spirit of obedience, accepted all without remonstrance, if not without pain; none suffered more under these drastic measures than the mistress of novices, that excellent Sister Anastasie Leleu, who was so loyally one with the two Foundresses, and whom Julie was wont playfully to name her *petit conseil*, leaning on her sound judgement only a little less than on that of her *grand conseil*, Mère Blin de Bourdon.

Elizabeth Victoire Boutrainghan, thus suddenly installed as Superior at the age of twenty-one, had been nurse in a family of good position in Amiens. She had been presented to Mère Julie as a postulant by M. de Sambucy himself, and, out of deference to him, accepted in spite of some doubts as to her fitness on the part of the Foundresses. She was not without valuable qualities. To an attractive exterior she united engaging manners, good taste and a certain *savoir faire*, which one frequently meets with in persons of her class; she had, moreover, a kind heart and some strength of character. But she had received no education, and the religious training which goes so far to supply its want was still very incomplete, for she had only passed nineteen months in religion. Further,

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her former position was well known in the town. Mère Julie had employed her in household work, for which she was fitted, and which supplied the exercise required by her active and sanguine temperament. But Sister Thérèse had somehow or other contrived to win the good graces of M. de Sambucy, who had allowed her to make annual vows after only one year's novitiate. He had proposed her to the Foundress as temporary superior during her absence, and had seen in the objections raised a proof of jealousy towards his protégée. It is but just to say that the young person herself opposed a measure of which she had the sense to see the dangers.

No sooner was Sister Thérèse transformed into Mère Victoire than she thought to win for herself prestige by adopting an extraordinary course of life. She ate scarcely anything, practised indiscreet austerities and passed long hours at a time in meditation. Mère Blin de Bourdon sketches the resulting situation in her *Memoirs*. "I know not," she writes, "what spirit was then abroad, but certain it is that praises positively rained upon Victoire. M. de Sambucy consulted her, and sent persons from outside to seek her direction. People of the town, even Superiors of convents, extolled her to her face. Young ladies, finding her respond to their expansive affection, became inordinately attached to her; they kissed

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her habit, they cut off locks of her hair for relics, they called her 'the Saint,' 'the holy penitent'; they vied with each other in exalting her virtues. In the convent some of the young Sisters, seeing their Superior going without food, thought it their duty to deprive themselves of the nourishment they needed, and several were on the point of ruining their health."* On the other hand, the reserve and religious modesty to which Julie had formed her daughters suffered, and in a short time the whole tone of the house was altered. Victoire, however, soon tried a flight which broke her wings. When she took up the daily instruction in Christian doctrine to the younger Religious—Julie's special gift and grace—the total *fiasco* was rendered yet more glaring by the contrast. Tales of her incompetence reached the ears of the Bishop, while several of his clergy pointed out to him that Victoire's former social position did not commend her as head of a house of education. The impulsive prelate, genuinely desirous of righting matters, first made an abortive attempt to impose on the unwilling Sisters as Superior a former Ursuline nun, and finally, as we have seen, joined with Père Varin in pressing Julie to return as quickly as possible. The Sisters on their side were beginning to call out loudly for the restoration of the two Foundresses.

* *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 98.

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But M. de Sambucy was determined not to have Julie back at Amiens, and once again managed to change the face of affairs. He multiplied letters and negotiations, and spread against the Servant of God suspicions which travelled as such things will, and took hold even of those who best knew her and should most completely have trusted her. Her return journey was but one series of disappointments and rejections.

On reaching Poitiers she called at the newly founded house of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, but even the Blessed Mme. Barat had been touched by the chill breath of rumour, and showed herself distant and cold. However, the community was about to enter into retreat, and the preachers, Fathers Lambert and Enfantin, seeing how sorely Julie needed rest, suggested that she should join in it. She began the exercises; but so strange a trouble took possession of her soul that she understood, and Père Lambert with her, that she was called elsewhere. So she passed on her journey, carrying with her a prediction from Père Enfantin—who still fed her with the bread of the strong—that she was to suffer “persecution on the part of the good.”

She arrived at Paris on the last day of November. At the Abbaye-au-Bois she found her old Amiens friend Mme. Leclercq completely changed towards her. She went on to the House of the

Sisters of Charity; here the chalice of bitterness brimmed over. Not only did the Superior General, to whom, in other days, she had extended hospitality at Amiens, meet her with the frigidity of a total stranger, but she handed to the Servant of God a crushing letter from Mgr. Demandolx, which, in direct contradiction with his last one, forbade her to return to the Convent of Notre Dame, or even to enter his diocese; she might go to Namur if she pleased. Absolutely ignorant of the cause of his displeasure, and in deep sorrow of heart, Julie sought that Friend "who, when all forsake, will not leave His own, nor suffer them to perish." * In the chapel of the Visitation she passed two hours prostrate in prayer, and came out strengthened to bear more. Père Varin was in Paris; her last visit should be to seek his wise and kind counsels. But once again creatures failed her. She found the poor Father on the one hand overwhelmed by the decree which Napoleon had just fulminated against the Fathers of the Faith ordering their dispersion and the dissolution of their colleges; on the other, under the unfavourable impression produced by a lengthy memorandum from M. de Sambucy detailing his complaints against Julie. So he, too, only received her with hard words. But now Mme. Leclercq, disabused of her momentary prejudices by the patient for-

* Imit. II, c. vii.

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titude of the Servant of God, was exerting herself with the Bishop of Amiens through the medium of M. Duminy, Curé of the Cathedral, to obtain for her friend permission at least to re-enter the diocese. Rumours of this measure reached the ears of M. de Sambucy and brought him down to Paris to checkmate it by a personal interview with Père Varin. "She has played her cards, has she?" he exclaimed angrily. The speech, reported to Julie—with what purpose save to try her virtue it is difficult to see—shows how vital to the Abbé's manœuvres was the absence of the Foundress from Amiens.

For eleven days she awaited in suspense the answer of Mgr. Demandolx. During this interval she paid a visit to Saint-Sulpice, where she found a valued adviser in the venerable M. Montaigne. At last authorization came for her to go on to Plessier-sur-Saint-Just, to M. de Lamarche. But here again disappointment was her portion; her old friend and confessor had been suddenly called to Montdidier to take up the government of the college there, left without a head by the dissolution of the Fathers of the Faith. Her position was at this moment forlorn indeed: she knew no one in Plessier; she was completely alone; all was dark and desolate before her. The simplicity of the following lines from one of her letters at this time is very beautiful, very eloquent, in

its true-hearted resignation and unfaltering charity.

"Praise be to our dear Jesus and His most holy Mother. . . . Pray that I may always do what is most pleasing to our good God, for there is nothing good save His most just will.

". . . Man proposes and God disposes. May His most just, most wise will be accomplished always and under all circumstances. . . . The good God looks for souls that have great trust in Him, yes, immense trust. Praised be our dearest Jesus! Praised be His blessed Cross! Let us love it, let us carry it; may it be our only happiness!"

After much prayer and deliberation Julie decided that, since she was no longer banished from the diocese, she might venture as far as Amiens, provided she did not show herself at the convent. She sought refuge, therefore, with one of her friends, Mme. de Rumigny. A somewhat singular incident belongs to her stay here: we give it in the words of the *Memoirs*. "It will prove," says Mère Blin de Bourdon, "how deeply every one who had any relations with M. de Sambucy became imbued with his own prejudices against the Foundress. At the dispersion of the Fathers of the Faith one of the Brothers, named Leonard, had attached himself to the service of the Abbé Louis (de Sambucy); he became his business

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man, messenger and so forth. Now Brother Leonard happened to come to the house of Mme. de Rumigny, and there saw Mère Julie in the company of that good lady, of M. Bicheron, who at the time taught resident pupils in the same house,* and of several other priests. Our Mother has since told me that it was impossible to conceive anything so hideous as Leonard's expression of countenance. When he perceived her he merely said, but in the most extraordinary tone of voice, 'You are very wrong to have come back!' 'I did not do so without advice, Leonard,' she said. He gave some brief answer; it was not the words but the look that made the impression. M. Bicheron, a strong, robust man, cast one glance at Leonard, and a moment afterwards was unaccountably taken so ill that the doctor was sent for. When he was a little better, Mère Julie said to him: 'What is the matter with you, Father. How did this come on?' He just answered: 'It was Leonard's face; did you not see Leonard's face?'"

The Foundress now wrote to the Bishop in the humblest terms, asking his pardon for whatever in her conduct had displeased him, and at last she was admitted to an interview. She made use of it

* Mme. de Rumigny had made over to the Abbé Bicheron a suite of rooms in her mansion, which was then known as the *Hôtel des Douze Pairs de France*, and later was converted into a hospital for incurables.

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only for a further act of self-abasement. Kneeling down before him with clasped hands, she asked him simply, and as if she had been guilty, to grant her his forgiveness; not a syllable of explanation, not a word of justification. She obtained permission, though not without difficulty, to go and recruit her shattered health at the Faubourg, but was given to understand that as soon as she was better she must go back to Namur. And so, on the feast of St. Francis Xavier, the Blessed Mother furtively re-entered her convent, as if she had been a criminal, and went up by a back staircase to her own room. Worn out with physical fatigue, and, yet more, with the mental trials which, though they had not ruffled her peace of soul, had profoundly shaken her sensitive nervous system, she fell ill and was obliged for some time to keep her bed. It was soon whispered in the community that the Foundress had returned, and the Sisters went in little groups to see her. Mère Victoire was one of the first; she threw herself into her arms with characteristic demonstrativeness and the strongest protestations of attachment, and even tendered the keys of the house, which Julie, however, prudently declined. But neither her unalterable patience, nor the gentle kindness with which she treated Victoire could dispel the prejudices of the Abbé, who strained every nerve to maintain the now

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damaged prestige of his favourite. By his command pupils and externs addressed her as *Madame*; her very dreams received from him a mystical interpretation. Under his influence a cabal was formed within the community itself, which, not content with spying on and misinterpreting all Julie's actions, reproached her to her face in no measured terms. Her conduct was that of a wild beast—poor Victoire was an angel in the flesh—Julie was like a jealous tigress, and so forth. In the midst of all this tempest of calumnies and insults the Servant of God felt “no more resentment,” says the friend who, to borrow Julie's words, had the key of her heart, “than a babe new born.” And she adds somewhere these simple but touching words: “In all the trying circumstances she met with, she felt every blow, offered her pain to God, and kept her soul in peace.”* How beautiful in its reticence and unshaken confidence is the letter she writes to Namur on December 8!

“God is so good that He helps us through everything like a tender Father. Let us put our whole trust in Him always, always. I have not been well since I came, but God will mend all that in time. Let us love Him with all our heart, let us serve Him as well as we can, let us put our

* *Memoirs*, vol. I, p. 121.

trust in Him alone. I repeat this twice over, because this God of all goodness likes to hear it said to Him often."

And to Mère St-Joseph:

"I know that the good God will come to our help. I cast myself into His merciful arms and into His adorable heart; put me deep into it, my dear. This is my one prayer: 'My Jesus, fasten me tight to Thy blessed Cross, and hold me there, for I am nothing but misery.' . . . My heart and my soul rest in God, in spite of all the fogs of the Somme. God alone!"

And up and down the page comes that ceaseless song of her heart,

"How good the good God is! Ah, how good He is!"

The naïve pleonasm which has passed into the motto of Notre-Dame was familiar to all who knew the Servant of God. "Tell my good Julie," Père Varin once wrote to Mère Barat, "that I constantly think of her, for I like to remind myself often that *the good God is good.*"

All of a sudden the Bishop, who, as we have said, passed rapidly from one impression to another, deposed Victoire to the post of Assistant, reinstating the Foundress as Superior. But such half-measures produced no real difference

in the situation. Neither did the seemingly radical change of substituting M. Cottu, his Vicar-General, as spiritual superior to the community in place of M. de Sambucy, who was restricted to his functions as confessor. The Abbé was still the moving power. He lived with M. Cottu, and the latter did nothing but by his advice. As to "Madame Victoire," he informed the Sisters that, her name having gone up to Government as Superior for three years, she must continue in office conjointly with Mère Julie. This arrangement brought the confusion to a climax, and it needed all the courage of the Servant of God to support the trial; but she drew her heroism, as the *Memoirs* remark, straight from its fountain-head, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

" December 23, 1807.

"How much we shall have to say to each other, dear friend, when it pleases the Divine Goodness to let us meet! Ah, yes! much that I have laid down in the sweet and loving Heart of Jesus—otherwise I could not have borne the burden. It was heavy enough to kill ten poor Julies like me. I am worth nothing at all for heaven yet. Do pray that the various trials it pleases our Lord to send me may serve to sanctify me. I am so clumsy, I make a mess of everything. You know how much I need to cleave to God alone. Yes, may He alone be my strength and

my support. . . . Courage ! let us not ask for rest yet. No, no, time presses, and the day is far spent. Let us set no bounds to our generosity towards the good God, and He will be lavish towards us. . . . Do let us learn once for all in our life the divine lessons which the sweet Child Jesus has come to teach us : simplicity, annihilation, poverty, contempt of all things, especially of ourselves. . . .”

And then she begins one of those delightful talks with each Sister which she is so fond of in her letters :

“Now for a few words with my other dear good children. I can tell them in all truth that I love them very dearly in our Lord Jesus, the proof being that I will not go to the crib of the dear Infant Jesus without every one of them. Their mind, their will, their little self-love—in fact, all the good and all the bad in them—it must all be laid at the feet of the dear Jesus, laid in those little Hands which He is stretching out to us. Ah ! my good Sister X. . . are you not going to give me your little bundle ? And you, my good Sister E. . . , with your pupils of the Boarding School, won't you give me all those little hearts that I may make a present of them to my dear Jesus together with all the little Day Scholars of Sister Xavier ? And good Sister R. . . , who is

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listening to all this, hurries up faster than all the rest with her bundle and her children, and says to me: 'Ma Mère, take everything, everything, and most of all myself, let me be of no account whatever any more; let all go to the Blessed Child Jesus in His crib.' Dear me! What a number of things I shall have to give to the Divine Child: yes, the wills of every one of us, for all that they are worth!

"*Gloria in excelsis Deo*, glory to God in the highest, and peace to men of good will, my dear daughters, that is heaven upon earth. Peace, yes, the peace which our Divine Master came to bring us at so great a cost. Ah! yes, the peace of God shall be in all our hearts, dearest Sisters, we will cherish it, we will carry it with us whithersoever we go."

A few weeks later she writes: "The devil would have liked to tangle the skein, but my God is stronger than he." And there follow kind words about Victoire—who would seem to have resigned her post of her own accord—giving her credit for a right will and a good intention, and asking prayers for her perseverance; noting gratefully that the interior spirit among the younger members is resuming its former vigour. "They needed an older person to guide them," she says delicately, "grey hairs are good for something after

all." A word at the end of the letter lets us know that the temporal interests, no less than the spiritual, had been compromised, and that she is troubled by the heavy debts that have been contracted, but "the good God takes care of us like a good Father."

Verily, Julie's was the charity which "thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,"* a charity which to Mgr. Pisani, who had watched all the circumstances, seemed so heroic that he did not fear to say after her death: "*Mère Julie will be canonized some day because during all her long trials at Amiens she never once failed in charity.*"†

She had other serious anxieties. Napoleon was contemplating the fusion of all religious congregations of women into two bodies only, the *hospitalières* and the *enseignantes*, and Julie's letters of this period are full of allusions to this proposed amalgamation, which threatened the life and spirit of her Society in a different manner. She consulted, prayed, took such wise precautions against the contingency as lay within her reach, and then fell back on her old rule, "Leave things to the good God."

Of a truth she could do little else in the continuous and ever-changing embarrassments and trials of these last years at Amiens.

* 1 Cor. xiii.

† Informatory process, *De Heroica Charitate*; Apostolical process, *De Fama Sanctitatis*.

CHAPTER XI

Expulsion from Amiens

IN Belgium the reputation of the new Institute and of the education it gave was spreading. At the beginning of the year 1808 came an application, made through Mgr. Pisani, for an establishment of Notre-Dame in the busy and populous town of Jumet; a house about to be evacuated by the Daughters of Providence was offered to the Sisters. Mère Julie submitted the proposal to the Bishop of Amiens and gave him the names of the subjects she had fixed upon for the new foundation; she had selected as Superior Victoire, hoping thus to extricate her honourably from an equivocal and embarrassing position. Mgr. Demandolx cordially approved everything, and himself told Julie to go in person to launch the boat. The house at St-Nicolas, also, though promising excellently, much needed a visit from the Mother General on account of its unhealthy situation, and she herself was earnestly longing to pour her heart into that of Mère Blin de Bourdon at Namur; Sister Anastasie, too, strongly urged the advisability of a speedy interview between the two



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Mothers. But very soon his Lordship, seeing things through the eyes of others, became suspicious of the motives of the Servant of God in the nomination of Victoire; the permission to go to Jumet was withdrawn. "Man proposes and God disposes," she writes quietly to Mère St-Joseph on February 2. "I told you I should start for Jumet at the beginning of this month; everything is changed—I cannot give you details; all I can say is to beg of you to try and gain time for this little foundation at Jumet, if, indeed, it is to be. . . . Ah! my dear daughter, we must pass through the fire if we are to be purified, and if we are to do anything of worth for God's glory. . . . The devil is raging but God shall prove the stronger."

The very next day she tells her friend that her departure is now fixed for the first days of March: "Come, my dear, let us put aside all sensible support. *God alone, more than ever!* He alone remains to us when all else fails. Never have I been better able to appreciate how frail is the support of creatures. Ah! how good it is to lean on Him whose stability is everlasting. Let us leave *all* to Him, *all*."

A fortnight later she announces:

"Things change from one moment to another, . . . I am now kept prisoner, as it were, in our own house,"

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Finally, in a long letter dated March 4, she gives the reason of this captivity: "I must not move an inch in your direction for fear I should stay with you, and the Amiens house should fall"—that house, be it remarked, whose existence not three months before had been supposed to depend upon her absence. "God has spared you in not letting you be here when we fell into other hands.* My God, my God, how good Thou art! support my weakness . . . Did I not tell you, my dear, that if you stayed with me I should get you plenty of crosses? Come, let us share between us these treasures of the good God, these precious pledges of His love. All that I ask of Our Lord is that I may fall in with His adorable plans, since His will leads me by this path. I am still so far from the term, from the measure I need in order to fill up all that God requires of me. The fault is all in my cowardice."

The Bishop had been persuaded to name as Superior for Jumet Sister Anastasie Leleu, mistress of novices at Amiens. The measure was a cruel pang to the Blessed Servant of God, not indeed because it set aside her exclusive right as Mother General to appoint the local Superiors, but because of the serious loss to the young noviciate and of the utterly desolate position in which she personally was to be left by the removal at

* In allusion to the departure of the Fathers of the Faith.

so trying a juncture of this prudent and loyal religious.

"Do you know," she writes in this same letter of March 4, "who are now named by the Bishop for Jumet? Sister Leleu, Sister Agnes and Sister Madeleine. Little Agnes is a dear, good child, but she needs another year of formation. All this is happening by the permission of the good God. May His holy will be done! Ah! my dear, pray that your poor Mère Julie may be very generous . . . Our dear Sisters are much distressed at having to go without me. Pray that God may give them grace to make their sacrifice. Mine, too, is a great one."

And some days later:

"The situation remains the same. They think I want to leave the Amiens house in order to go and settle at Namur. But I have no intention of forsaking this convent. It was the first which the good God, in His mercy, and through many tribulations, established. . . . The Sisters who are starting for Jumet will go to-morrow to get his Lordship's blessing, and will then make a last attempt to obtain leave for me to take them: if our good God does not permit it, may His Holy Name be blessed!"

The request was not granted; and a final change of plans sent off Sisters Leleu and Françoise Belin alone to Jumet on March 21, with the

understanding that others would follow. So the Foundress had lost her *petit conseil* as well as her *grand conseil*. But the brave heart was too firmly anchored in God to be shaken by the removal of any human support. "All who consider the guidance of God in our affairs are inclined to think that He wants something very special of us. When and how? That is what I must adore. And yet," she continues, "to be tied here without having the right of saying or doing anything for the good of the Institute, to be wholly inactive—I do not know if God asks that of me after having in His great mercy restored to me the use of my limbs." There was a rumour that M. de Sambucy was to be named Visitor; Julie "blesses the good God, by His holy grace, for all that is happening"; she is not sorry that he should go and see them at Namur; her only grief would be that she herself, as seems likely, should be forbidden to visit her dear Sisters. The good father, she knows, means well—only "in his own way and acting all by himself." But "if such is the holy will of God all will go well; if He wishes differently He will know how to direct everything for the best." Ah! well might Julie Billiart tell her daughters that she was wont to offer them all daily to God that they might "become in all things *victims of His blessed and adorable will*;" fitly could she pray that they might always "live on true



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Faith, on holy Hope, on divine Charity." She has preached these things to us in other ways than words. "Although our Mother," say the *Memoirs* of Mère St-Joseph, "was, so to speak, identified with the Institute and full of zeal for all that could procure its advantage, she was perfectly ready to accept whatever might befall it by God's permission. I believe that what St. Ignatius said of himself could have been said of her, that a quarter of an hour's prayer would have been enough to console her for the destruction of all our houses. At these critical moments she used to repeat, 'The good God can destroy what He has set up. We must keep very quiet in the hands of the Lord. Is He not the Master to do and to undo?'"

The Bishop of Tournay, in which diocese Jumet is situated, received the two travellers with every mark of consideration and affection; but Jumet itself, owing to the transference of its good curé to Gosselies while the long negotiations for the foundation were pending, only gave them the austere welcome of rigorous poverty—bare walls, with no fuel, no food, no beds but a little straw. We need hardly say that Mère St-Joseph very soon came down from Namur to help and console them, and thus learnt at last from the lips of Sister Anastasie the full detail of Julie's persecuted life. At once she wrote to the Blessed Servant of God:

“Jumet, April 1, 1808.

“My dear Mother,

“I arrived here the day before yesterday, and I go away again to-morrow. I have seen all, read all, understood all. Ah! poor Mother, what does it all mean? And yet I am not surprised at anything; rejoice with a great joy, for it is thus that God treats His friends. Be convinced that all will come right in the end, and that a path will open out before you. I own that at this moment all is darkness; one does not know which way to turn nor what steps to take. One thing only appears to me tolerably clear—and Sister Anastasie (Leleu) is of my opinion,—and that is, that I should acquaint M. Minsart with the state of affairs before M. de Sambucy comes to make his visitation at Namur and Jumet. M. Minsart is so good and so well disposed towards us that this can do no harm. Let us pray earnestly that God may grant us always to do His holy will; that is all I desire, nothing else is worth striving for.”

Thus do the Saints comfort the Saints!

Julie's answer takes up the note:

“All that has happened, all that is daily happening, is the permission of the good God. May His holy Name be blessed! And may His exceeding mercy grant me the needful graces to comport myself in all this according to His Heart, accord-

ing to His adorable will. That is my one and only desire. . . .

"In the depth of my soul, I am perfectly resigned. Oh, yes, my God, I am intimately convinced that our little Company is Thy work. And the works of God must needs be proved and tried, that their foundations may be sure.

"I should not refuse to submit to M. de Sambucy, even though he is not our superior, if he did not go to the length of suppressing all those rights which a superioress is bound to exercise in the position in which God has placed her. I must speak to you quite frankly: obedience has never been to me a heavy yoke, still less an intolerable one. All I ask is the liberty to make my little representations where the good of our houses is concerned. Then, if I am mistaken, let a better opinion be followed. Give me your views on all this, clearly and straightforwardly." Humility and generosity could surely hardly go further than this.

It was quite evident that the Jumet establishment needed the firm hand of the Foundress to put it on a stable footing, and Mgr. Demandolx, informed of the condition of things there, one day sent for Julie, to her own great surprise, and asked her if she were satisfied with the new foundation. "Not too well, my Lord," she replied. "Nor I," rejoined the Bishop. "Mère Julie, you

must go there, and if our Sisters have not all they need, bring them back to me, and those of St-Nicolas as well. I will not have them killed. Why, it was a mortal sin," he added with a smile, "to put them in such a damp house."

Julie lost no time in profiting by this unexpected leave, before it should be revoked. In a few days her prudent energy had regulated the material difficulties and organized the classes, and the unlooked-for joy of her strong and sweet presence among them braced the poor Sisters like a tonic. How gladly the Foundress passed thence to Namur may be imagined. After conferring with each other and with M. Minsart, it was judged expedient to lay before Mgr. Pisani the nature of the opposition which was being made at Amiens to the expansion of the Institute, as well as to consult him on the delicate point of the total control of Mère Blin de Bourdon's income extorted from her by M. de Sambucy. Thus the Bishop of Namur came to learn for the first time her family name and social position: humility had been as silent as charity.

He judged it imperative that she should return with Julie to Amiens for a while, to watch over the financial settlement. They took St-Nicolas on their way, and found the good Superior, Sister St-Jean (Garson), reduced to so wretched a condition of health by the dampness and unhealthi-

ness of the house, that Julie would give herself no rest till she had hired another one and transferred the whole household thither. As she was leaving St-Nicolas there arrived, forwarded from Jumet, a letter from Mgr. Demandolx, the severity of which, by contrast with his benevolent attitude at her departure, came upon her like a thunderbolt. It ran as follows:

“I had already remarked, my dear daughter, that nothing was able to bring you back to that spirit of simplicity and obedience which I had so much recommended to you, and that, in spite of my counsels and your promises, you act, whenever you think my eye is not on you, according to your private notions and petty personal passions. I am quite able to detect these through the mask of your protestations and sham humility; and I have now fresh proof of them in the audacity with which, on setting out for Jumet, you took upon yourself to violate one of the most vital articles of your Rule. It is there stated that in the case of absence of the first Superior, she is to be replaced by the Mother Assistant to whom the Sisters shall render obedience. Yet you have set aside Mère Victoire, and have given orders on your own private authority, that in any difficulty that supervenes the Sisters are to address themselves to the Mistress of Novices. Whence can

proceed this recommendation of yours if not from that secret jealousy which you nourish in the depths of your soul against a subject whom you dislike because she is worth more than yourself, and on whom God will be pleased to shower His graces in proportion as you strive to humble her? I beg to inform you, therefore, that I have re-established things in the condition in which you ought to have left them; I have ordered the community to obey Sister Victoire and have commissioned the Vicar-General to see that it is done. Nor is this all: as I make a good guess that you will stick to your ideas and prejudices, I forbid you, under any pretext whatsoever, to bring back Sister Anastasie to Amiens.

“I quite expect that you will find my letter rather harsh; but I bate not a single word of it, for I am convinced that you need to be brought back to those sentiments of genuine humility without which it is impossible that you should produce any fruit in souls.

“Francis, Bishop.”

The action which Mgr. Demandolx thus construed as rebellion and pride was in reality a very simple one. Sister Anastasie had been replaced in the office of Mistress of Novices by Sister Jeanne Godelle. This religious was eminently a person of good counsel. Already thirty years old

at her entrance into the Institute, she had seen the world before leaving it; her excellent judgment had been trained by a superior and finished education, and all her natural and acquired gifts were habitually exercised in the light of the strong faith in which she lived. When, therefore, just as she was leaving Amiens, some of the Sisters who had but scant confidence in the Assistant asked their mother to whom they should turn if they needed some spiritual advice in her absence, Julie quite naturally and without *arrière-pensée* had named the Mistress of Novices.

The travellers reached the Faubourg-Noyon on May 5, and Mère Blin de Bourdon at once sent to present her respects to the Bishop and to ask an audience, but can hardly have been surprised to receive the answer that his Lordship was going away in a day or two for a month's journey, and could not see the Mothers till his return. Mère St-Joseph wrote, therefore, to Mgr. Pisani to excuse her prolonged absence, and on June 7, 1808, the benevolent prelate replied gracefully:

“Accustomed as I am to sacrifices, my dear daughter, I submit to that of being deprived, for some time longer, of your presence here, and of the example of your virtues and works of charity. The propositions you are submitting to the Bishop

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of Amiens could not be wiser or more reasonable. Do not doubt that this worthy prelate, who is a true father to his flock, will grant with kindness as well as justice the different requests you are making. I am convinced that my opinion is his, and I should not offer the least opposition to your wishes. I console myself with the belief that the salubrity of our city, the religious spirit which reigns there, and the proofs I have given you of my pastoral affection, will all induce you to return to your daughters at Namur, who, indeed, are longing to have you back amongst them. Their conduct continues to be beyond praise; the number of pupils is increasing, but the house, to my great regret, cannot be enlarged. Take care of your health, come back as soon as you are able, and bring with you, if possible, your good mother, whom I salute and cherish in the Lord. I entertain the same sentiments towards yourself, my dear daughter in Jesus Christ, and in them I leave you at His Feet, pierced, as was His Heart, by His love for us."

Authorized by the Vicar-General, the two Mothers utilized the delay by visiting the little house at Montdidier. Under the paternal protection of M. de Lamarche it had been making rapid progress; indeed, the main difficulty of the Sisters was to comply with Julie's injunction,

given out of consideration for a neighbouring convent, that they should keep away from their schools children who could afford to pay fees. Yielding to pressure from the parents they had ended by admitting a few of these well-to-do pupils. The concession had brought them a characteristic letter from their Mother, once more exhorting them to receive none but "very poor children who cannot pay anything at all." Of these they were to gather as many as possible, for they were at Montdidier absolutely and only for the poor. It was against her express wish that payment had been taken from anyone, and if any such scholars were still with them they were to be at once sent away. "Let us not trouble ourselves, my dear Sister Catherine,* about who will feed us; our good Father is in heaven. Suppose you find after a while that what you have is only enough for two of you, the good God will feed the third, or He will put her somewhere else." They had life and raiment—what more could daughters of hers desire? She, indeed, had but one desire and prayer for them—that they should daily grow in the spirit of their holy vocation by a thorough detachment from the things of earth. There is the usual joyous exultation over that grand vocation which made war on the devil by snatching souls from his grasp; and the

* Sister Catherine Daullée, Superior.

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usual exhortation to the "masculine courage" needed for the task; there is a practical counsel to do all their work in an orderly spirit, because "the Lord loves order and has Himself done all things in order and measure," and a maternal recommendation to take great care of their health, "without softness, of course, in God and for God."

Julie now installed as Superior at Montdidier Sister Marie-Caroline Cardon, transferring Sister Catherine Daullée to St-Nicolas. The latter was followed by the regrets of all the town, for her holiness had won her the general esteem and affection, as it was speedily to win them in Flanders.

Good Sister St-Jean, whose robust constitution had been ruined by the two winters passed in the unhealthy house of *den Berkenboom*, was thus set free from her duties. The Foundress offered her the alternative of returning to Amiens or going to one of the other houses, but the invalid protested against being allowed any choice in the matter.

"My dear and good Mother," she wrote, "we received your letter of May 25 with the greatest joy. The happiness which filled me on learning that you were about to give me a substitute made such an impression on me that I at once began to get better. But your letter of to-day has a very

different effect. Never has any letter of yours caused me so much pain, because you tell me to *do as I like*. It is only hopelessly naughty children who are told to do as they like. I have deserved this, no doubt, by paying too much attention to a little sickness and suffering, and worrying you so often about it. But, my dear Mother, you could not give me a greater punishment than to tell me to do as I like. Oh! a nice mess I shall make of things if I do as I like. . . .

“Dear Mother, forgive me all the faults which made you say this to me, and for pity’s sake say so to me no more, but reckon me among your true daughters and tell me what you wish me to do.”

The young religious who thus showed herself so true a disciple of her Blessed Mother was obedient unto death. She went back to Amiens, but, as her health did not improve, her native air was, by the advice of the doctors, tried for her, but without effect. She only lived till January, 1809.

After Montdidier Julie visits Paris to try and get Government help in the difficulties with the corporation of St-Nicolas. She is active and energetic as ever. She is obliged, she writes word to her daughters, to run from one end of the town to the other, but after having done all in her power to bring matters to a successful issue she shall leave everything in God’s Hands. She sees,

indeed, that He had His own merciful designs in allowing her to take this little journey—she will tell them all about His goodness to her on her return.

The special grace in question seems to have been some new cross, for she exclaims: "Let us look at our daily trials with the eye of faith—the cross is the most excellent present, the most precious gift that God can give to His children. I have read somewhere that the more crosses God prepares for a soul the more light and grace He also prepares for her. So let us try to help one another to carry the cross He means for us." To Mère Blin de Bourdon who had communicated some fresh complaints against her, she is more explicit, and more unreserved in that "joy of the spirit" which À Kempis says the cross brings to its lovers.

"All that you tell me in your letter I had already heard, and also something better still. Tell me, then, whether the good God is good enough, and whether He is not able to find me at Paris as at Amiens and St-Nicolas. An abundance of good things does no harm for a happy eternity. Remember what you used to say to me—that it is unlucky to be with me, because there was nothing to expect but crosses. Indeed, we have our share. But take courage, my dear, you know where all this

is to land us; heaven, yes, heaven, shall be the reward of our constancy."

Even as in the year before, the return journey to Amiens was a *Via crucis*; now, as then, those whom she most revered met her with altered mien and manner, thus helping her, as Mère Blin de Bourdon reflects, to a total detachment from all that is human, by teaching her through personal experience that God alone changes not. And, she adds, that without this discipline her affectionate and grateful nature might have clung to those who had shown her kindness. In the meanwhile Mère Blin had had an audience with Mgr. Demandolx, had answered with perfect frankness the questions put to her on the subject of the Foundress, and had plainly expressed her opinion that things would go on better without M. de Sambucy. But she had evidently made little or no impression, for Mère Julie arrived to find that matters had culminated—the Rule was to undergo revision. The Bishop himself informed the two Mothers of some of the projected changes—the suppression of the office of Superior General, of the visitation of the secondary houses, and other no less radical departures from the primitive design of the Institute.

Just at this critical moment the presence of the Foundress at Bordeaux was asked for by Mgr.

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d'Aviau. For some time past Mère Vincent had been begging for a visit from the Superior General. She and the community at Ste. Eulalie earnestly desired a fixed and final Rule of life; and she had suggested to Julie that this important matter could be easily concerted at Bordeaux with Fathers Lambert and Gloriot and others of the Fathers of the Faith who so fully understood the aims of her Society. Julie herself, who saw well that any rules emanating from the Bishop's House at Amiens would only sow for us whirlwind and storm, thought this might be the pointing of the finger of God. She prayed one of her trustful prayers, and then "I must go," she said: "the good God will show me what He wants. He knows that I seek but Him alone." This abstinence from immediate action, this being content to wait when important junctures seemed to call for prompt decision, is a noteworthy point in the life of Blessed Julie. Ardent nature and eager heart as she was, she constantly paused where to mere human gaze the road was clear; for even as the eyes of the handmaid on the hands of her mistress were her eyes ever unto the Lord her God. Here in Amiens all is for her and hers difficulty and pain; and to the West Bordeaux calls her, and to the East Namur holds out its arms—Namur, which, as she told Mère St-Joseph, had so strangely pulled at her heart-strings

when first she passed its gates. Yet Julie waits.

The Bishop of Amiens, to whom also Mgr. d'Aviau had written asking for the Foundress, first gave his consent, unaccountably withdrew it on the morrow, the next day as unaccountably renewed it. Julie was told to pass through Paris, and M. de Sambucy put into her hands a packet of letters for Père Varin, then staying in the capital, with the request that she would deliver them in person. It seems incredible that these letters were a tissue of charges against herself, that there was no intention of her ever reaching Bordeaux, and that the whole thing was, in the words of Père Sellier, "an odious scheme," which, by playing on the forgiving unsuspectingness of the Servant of God, should ensure her receiving the sentence of her condemnation from the lips of her former Superior himself. Few scenes in her suffering life are more pathetic than this where, having joyfully sought out her *bon Père Varin*, she herself ingenuously puts into his hands the formidable indictment which was to turn him, too, against her. In the history of an ordinary woman it would bring tears of indignant pity to the eyes; but Julie Billiard was a Saint, and we see in it one of the good fortunes of the Saints and congratulate our Blessed Mother in the words of Mère St-Joseph, "Re-

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joy with a great joy, it is thus God treats His friends."

The Father overwhelmed her by his severity. She and Mère Blin were two mad women; all the bishops were against them, including Mgr. Pisani himself; very soon not a place would receive her; new Rules must be drawn up, and by no one else but M. de Sambucy. He forbade her to go on to Bordeaux; she was to return at once to Amiens and herself petition the Abbé to frame the constitutions according to his own inspirations. In point of fact, the Father had no authority to command her as, since the dissolution of the Fathers of the Faith, the ties of obedience to the members of that Society had, by his own desire, ceased to exist. But such calculations were far removed indeed from her of whom Père Thomas said that "she obeyed like a little child," from her who used to repeat to her Sisters, "Be victims of holy obedience; if you are not daughters of blind obedience you will not be God's daughters or mine." So once again she strengthened her spirit by long hours of prayer in the chapel of the Visitation Convent, and in the confession she made before leaving it God poured His comforts into her bruised heart. The *Memoirs* tell us that the priest to whom she addressed herself spoke to his unknown penitent words of so much unction and such divine *à propos*

that Julie felt they came to her inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself. Then, with a simple submission which under the circumstances Mère Blin de Bourdon fitly characterizes as heroic, she turned towards Amiens.

We may ask—had Père Varin really been shaken by de Sambucy's representations, or was his treatment of Julie but a purposed trial of her spirit? If the latter, surely no greater testimony to her sanctity could well be borne. And it seems to us impossible not to admit this as the true explanation. Père Varin had himself, it will be remembered, warned Julie against the Abbé's mania for innovation. The Rules which she was defending against the Amiens authorities were largely of his own drafting. He knew the Servant of God intimately, and it was he who after her death epitomised her holiness in the appellation, "She who, while on earth, lived only on love." His own mature experience, prudence, and great virtue render it exceedingly unlikely that he would be so readily thrown off his balance. In any case, he was deeply edified by Julie's humility and obedience, and soon after his interview with her wrote off a strong letter to M. de Sambucy on his conduct in her regard. "Had the whole universe been against her, you, at least, should have taken her part. Your intentions, possibly, were good—not so have been, unfortunately,

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their consequences." This reproof from his former Superior seems to have stung the Abbé's conscience, and he was generous enough to try and repair the mischief he had done to the reputation of the Servant of God by addressing to the Bishops of Ghent and Tournay, and to the Vicar-General of the Bishop of Bordeaux, a retraction of his statements.

The nobility of her own conduct doubtless helped to open his eyes. Though she reached Amiens tired out and ill, she went straight to his house, and with the generosity and openness which were part of her great character, and the perfect trustfulness which came of seeing God's will in all, begged him to draw up the new Rules. The proposal, which did not, of course, come as a surprise, was graciously accepted. But if the Abbé's cordiality made Julie conceive any hopes of a final agreement, they were at once dashed on entering the convent. The few days of her absence had been a stormy time, and she found her much-tried community under a species of interdict.

A childishly trivial occurrence had brought down upon it the confessor's severity—the involuntary laughter of some novices at table, misinterpreted by Mère Victoire as a personal affront, and by her reported as such to the too willing ear of the Abbé. The Assistant did not

appear in the refectory again that day, and Mère Blin de Bourdon judged it a matter of wisdom and duty to explain in a few words the situation of affairs to the Sisters, who must, indeed, already have been conscious that there was something in the air. "If," she said in conclusion, "we cannot stay here, we will go elsewhere; let those who love us follow us!" The response was unanimous; cries of "I will," "And I," rang out on all sides.

The incident must have convinced the authorities of the genuine attachment of the Sisters to the Superior whom, among other things, they accused of harshness and inflexibility. Perhaps on this very account it was the more severely judged and punished; the supposed failures towards Mère Victoire were branded as disobedience to the Bishop; timorous consciences were alarmed by the mention of mortal sin and hell-fire; Holy Communion was denied to the entire community for a period.

From Namur, happily, came occasional breezes of hope to lighten the atmosphere. Already just before Julie's departure for Paris, Mgr. Pisani had written separately to both Julie and her companion: he feels sure that his colleague of Amiens will yield to the wise reasons of the Superior-General; in any case, these things are trials which will pass like all others; and he assures each of the Mothers of the devotedness

of his own diocese to their Institute, and of the joy he shall feel in welcoming "the whole swarm" if it be God's will that it leave the hive.

Now, on August 14, came a long letter from M. Minsart to Mère St-Joseph in the same strain: "I am not surprised at the sufferings your Mother has to endure from her Superiors. It can hardly be otherwise when they are attempting to infuse into a society like yours a spirit opposed to that which gathered you together, and which is engraven on your hearts; and when, again, they are giving their support to a young Superior, who may be virtuous, but who lacks the experience necessary for directing souls. The accounts I have had from Sister Anastasie, who co-operates so worthily in the work of God, and fills so capably the post entrusted to her at Jumet, convince me that you ought not to tie yourself to one place more than another. You must examine whether the Rule they wish to impose on you is contrary to the spirit of the original one, and to the work of God which Mère Julie has so well begun, and which could not have made such rapid progress without His special protection. I should assuredly never be against your accepting, in all humility, the crosses, tribulations and sufferings sent by God; but if the work of God and His glory are diminished thereby, then I think it is

good to seek them *in the place whither a road is pointed out to you by God.*"

But Julie, following the wise man's counsel, "make not haste in the time of clouds," awaited some yet clearer manifestation of God's will. Save for that adorable will, it was no little thing to sever herself and her apostolic work from Amiens, from Picardy, from France. So she lent herself cheerfully to long conversations with M. de Sambucy on the Rules, and, as she was incapable of doing things by halves, frankly set before him the freedom in which the Bishop of Namur left the Congregation, even carrying her trust so far as to show him, confidentially, the letter in which the prelate had offered her a refuge. The Abbé was disloyal enough to use her words in order to try and poison against her the mind of Mgr. Pisani, twisting the remarks on his paternal government into a desire for independence, and mentioning the communication of his own letter in such a light that the good prelate seems to have been momentarily pained by it as an indiscretion.

Meanwhile, the presence of the Blessed Mother was bringing all manner of blessings to the Faubourg-Noyon. The classes overflowed with her dear poor; her large and loving spirit breathed itself through the community, filling all hearts with joyous fervour and burning zeal, and making

the house a model of regular observance ; many postulants offered themselves. The blessing and protection of God were felt in countless delicate attentions of His Providence. One day Julie was going to give the habit to a postulant, and sent for the bonnet to which the veil is fastened. Sister Gertrude—the young Ciska Steenhaut whose acquaintance we have already made—had the care of the wardrobe, but answered the Foundress that there was in the house neither bonnet nor stuff to make one. Then Julie bade her go to the chapel and lay her difficulty before our Lord, and after return to the habit-room where she would find what she stood in need of. Ciska went, but alas ! no bonnet was forthcoming. “Child of little faith,” said Julie when she came to tell her, “go back to the chapel.” Ciska went back, and naïvely begged our Lord with great earnestness to help her out of her trouble “because *Ma Mère* wishes it.” And when she returned to her room the bonnet lay before her on a chair. She carried it to the Servant of God, who at once placed it on the head of the new novice ; “and never,” said the old Sisters, “did bonnet fit so well.”

Another time Ciska received orders to make a new habit for the next day. She objected that she had no black stuff, only a piece of white serge. “Reasoning as usual !” rejoined the Blessed Mother ; “go back to your office and you will find

black cloth there." Great indeed was Sister Gertrude's surprise to find the piece of white material which she had left in the room changed to black; but Julie wondered not, "for," say the contemporary witnesses, "she knew the goodness of Him in whom she placed all her trust."*

Meanwhile, the colony at Namur was becoming uneasy at the prolonged absence of Mère St-Joseph, and, supported by Mgr. Pisani and M. Minsart, was earnestly petitioning for a visit from their Superior General. Jumet and St-Nicolas urged their own claims, and M. Cottu, in spite of his theories, was forced to admit in presence of their representations that it was sometimes desirable to visit the houses.

Accordingly, Mère Julie was authorized to go to Belgium, and on her way to make a new foundation at the little village of Rubempré, near Amiens. She was accompanied by Sisters Eulalie de Laporte and Firmine Queste, destined respectively for Namur and Jumet where help was badly needed, and by a niece of the M. Bicheron whom we met at the house of Mme. de Rumigny—Sister Scholastique Pelletier, whom she left at Rubempré. In the curé of Rubempré, the Abbé

* See Notices on the First Sisters of the Institute by Sister Louis de Gonzague (Hortense Monseu), Superior of the first colony of Sisters who went to America in 1840. She spent her last years at Namur, collecting details for biographies of the early Sisters from the lips of those who had known them. She died at Namur in 1866.

Chevalier, she found one of those learned and holy priests whom God set at intervals along her path to strengthen her in difficult moments by their sure counsels, and who, having once come in contact with the Servant of God, remained her friends and advisers through life. M. Chevalier encouraged her not only to adhere to the primitive plan of her Institute but to withdraw from Amiens if she could not carry it out there.

At Namur the necessity for more extensive premises was making itself seriously felt. The classes of the poor school were crowded, a boarding school had been begun and a workroom for lace-making opened.*

The wing of the Seminary so generously lent by Mgr. Pisani could only accommodate a very limited number of Sisters and children, and was without garden; the want of space and air was beginning to tell on the health of the inmates. For some time past the indefatigable M. Minsart had been on the look out for more suitable premises, and had at last set his heart on the former mansion of the Counts Quarré, in the Rue des Fossés. With its suites of spacious rooms and its beautiful gardens this property seemed exactly

*The head of this department, Anne Leroy, was the first Sister of Notre-Dame to pass to her eternal reward. She had died at the beginning of the year we are writing of, 1808, having taken her vows on her deathbed; "a very beautiful soul," says Mère St-Joseph, "who had gone through extraordinary suffering."

what was wanted, and the good priest had written glowing accounts of it to Mère St-Joseph. Unfortunately, the Bishop's authorization was necessary, and Mgr. Pisani, on financial grounds, hesitated. But no obstacles cooled the zeal of the devoted chaplain: with the aid of charitable friends he was able to guarantee the rent for the first two years, and on October 23 Julie writes:

"This journey was arranged by the kind Providence of my God. I arrived at Namur on the 21st at eight o'clock. The next day the Bishop sent for me towards evening, and the good God permitted that I should have a very kind reception. He stated his views with regard to the house in the Rue des Fossés which M. Minsart wants to take for us. I kept myself in perfect indifference, and referred the matter entirely to His Lordship's decision. In the end he told me to go and see the house, which turned out to be just what had been described to us. Seeing that it suits us, the Bishop finished by giving his consent, and to-morrow we sign the contract. Our Sisters are much pleased with their future dwelling; they will go into it at Christmas."

She adds that her good God seems to have some hidden purpose in all this. She has spoken quite openly to Mgr. Pisani and he thinks her reasons sound and good, but approves of her

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waiting a little longer. Simplicity and straightforwardness are the true way to find Our Lord and win His divine help; she hopes to see these virtues in her dear daughters, whose sole ambition ought to be to procure the glory of God. The letter ends with her loving cry in sunshine or in storm, "How good is the good God! Blessed be our dear Jesus!"

Julie had left as provisional Superior at Namur during the absence of Mère St-Joseph Sister Xavier, removed, as the reader may remember, from St-Nicolas. In the latter unhealthy locality she had already contracted the malady which was so soon to carry her off. Julie found her very ill, and saw too that the community was suffering under her somewhat imperious and rigid exercise of authority. Unable, in the critical condition of affairs at Amiens, to restore to them as yet their former beloved Superior, Julie did the best she could by leaving as Assistant Sister Eulalie de Laporte, a young religious, but a person of great virtue. Uniting, as she did, tact and talent to a very winning and lovable character, her appointment was universally acceptable.

There was plenty else to see to: exchange of subjects between Namur and Jumet, the dismissal of a novice of whom she said, "She is guided by nothing but her own scrupulous head, we should have an inexhaustible fund of trouble with her,"

and, at St-Nicolas, which she visited on her return journey, a new house to be rented for the overcrowded Poor School. There was sorrow for her mother's heart in this last place; Geneviève Gosselin, one of the first Sisters to enter the Institute, was giving trouble there by a spirit of insubordination and by a dangerous hankering after work in the boarding-school for which she was in no way fitted. The presence of the Servant of God, whose influence with her was very strong, brought her back for a time to the path of duty, but not for long; she ended by throwing up her vocation and returning to the world.

However overwhelmed with business she might be, Julie could always find time to comfort any of her daughters who were suffering in body or soul. From St-Nicolas she wrote to Sister Xavier:

“As for you, my dear child, rest more than ever in the bosom of God, be it to live or be it to die. May His good pleasure be accomplished in us always and in everything . . . Let us drink the chalice which our divine Master holds to our lips, let us drink it willingly and gladly; you know that your poor mother Julie is drinking it together with Sister Xavier. . . . Live wholly on God, my daughter, live in Him alone. May the pure love of an entire conformity to His holy will be the food of your soul, may your tender Mother Mary

be your consolation ; you will find her at the foot of the Cross."

Mère Julie passed on to Ghent, spending a night in the *diligence* in order to avoid travelling on All Saints' Day. The newly-appointed bishop of the city, Mgr. de Broglie, had been a fellow-student of Louis de Sambucy at the Seminary of St-Sulpice, and we have seen that the latter had turned his former intimacy to account by trying to prejudice him against Mère Julie. Nor had his first efforts been without effect; Mgr. de Broglie had expressed himself very harshly to Sister St-Jean, then Superior of the Convent at St-Nicolas, on the subject of the Foundress, calling her a *coureuse*, and affirming that her house would come to ruin and that all who persisted in following her would share the same fate. He added, however, with characteristic straightforwardness, that his impressions had only been formed on hearsay. They were the easier, therefore, to dispel. Sister St-Jean refuted the calumnious accusations by a quiet statement of facts, and the prelate, thoroughly satisfied by her firm though gentle answers, was loud in his praises of her goodness. "My Lord," quickly rejoined the loyal religious, "if the mother were bad, would the daughters be good?"

The Bishop's secretary, M. Van Schouwen-

berghe, and his Vicar-General, M. Le Surre, whom Julie now consulted on the difficulties of the Congregation, wisely judged that a personal interview would be the surest means of dispelling any lingering suspicions in her regard, and so procured her an audience. "They have given me a bad name to you, have they not, Mère Julie?" were the Bishop's first words, and then followed a conversation which, as she tells Mère St-Joseph, made her once again sing that her good God was very good. Mgr. de Broglie's last doubts fell before the simple frankness of the Servant of God. "Courage," she writes from Ghent to her children at Amiens, "let us keep our eyes on heaven. Let us go out of ourselves by the little sacrifices God asks of us moment by moment, one at a time. So shall we complete our crowns, so shall we reach our happy eternity."

By mid-November she was back in their midst, and, as twice before, returned to find old troubles sprung from new causes. A malignant and highly-contagious epidemic, a sort of typhoid fever, had broken out in the convent. Mère St-Joseph, after nursing the sick, was herself attacked, and Mère Victoire then undertook the chief care of the infirmaries. Finding herself too busy to give the daily instruction in Christian Doctrine to the community, and perhaps not sorry to avail herself of a plausible motive for dispensing herself

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from the task, she begged Mère St-Joseph to fulfil it in her place, a request which the latter acceded to without difficulty as soon as she was sufficiently recovered. Once more the Bishop saw in the occurrence an interference with the rights of Victoire, and a message brought by M. Cottu informed the community that, when the Assistant was hindered from giving the Catechism lesson, there would be none at all.

Julie found no fewer than twenty-three Sisters still in bed with fever, and no signs of improvement in their state. She went at once to the infirmaries and exclaimed as she entered: "My children, if you have faith, rise." All got up at her bidding, perfectly cured, except four whose convalescence was very slow, and who all, after their recovery, proved to have no vocation and left the convent.

The young sister Eulalie de Laporte had wept bitterly on parting with her Superior-General, and Julie, it seems, had half playfully given her leave to shed five tears every day in honour of Our Lord's Five Sacred Wounds. Already, from St-Nicolas, the following charmingly characteristic letter had found its way to Namur:

"Well, my dear daughter, what is your little heart saying just at this moment? Have you not gone beyond your five tears a day? 'Ah! *ma*

Mère, what are you saying? Five tears every day? As soon as ever I made my sacrifice my soul got strong. No more tears, my Mother, but souls—souls which have cost the Blood of our dear Jesus! No, no, I will no longer be a child; I can behave as a grown-up person now. What! *ma Mère*, do you then no longer remember the charge you laid on my weak shoulders, the charge of watching over the whole house? The courage of a man has taken possession of me.—You see, my dear child, how I make you talk; we are having a little conversation together in God. Ah! my dear daughter, you know what a place you have in my heart; but, as for you, never leave our dearest Jesus or His blessed Mother. Think only of pleasing God in all things. . . . ”

Mère Julie had desired Sister Eulalie to keep her fully informed of all that passed in the community and schools. The young religious was somewhat forgetful of this recommendation, and her Blessed Mother now writes her a long letter of reminder. With that practical wisdom which characterized her administration, she enters into the minutest details, and tells the new Assistant all she wishes her to say—about the health of Sister Xavier, the pupils, the relations with outsiders, the new house in the Rue des Fossés into which the Community are removing on this very

6th of December which dates her letter, etc. She knows well that Sister Eulalie's time is filled to a minute, but when an order has been received everything must give way to obedience. She—Mère Julie—likes to be present in all her houses by the continual letters she gets from them, to know everything just as if she were there in her room. Sister Eulalie must remember that she will have to answer to God for any harm that comes through her not having told things. "You see that you have been in fault, my child," says the Blessed Mother tenderly; "well, now you are going to repair it by giving me full details of everything." She repeats once again the assurance that she knows the good will is there, and that it is rather time which is wanting. But the required account must be given, and if Sister Eulalie really has no other leisure, she must take the hour of meditation, and the act of obedience will be her prayer. It will be a good plan for the future to set down in a memorandum book all the little incidents which are to furnish matter for her letters. Very likely all sorts of objections will suggest themselves to her repugnance or her self-love, as that *ma Mère* will not be able to read her handwriting, or that she composes badly, writes at too great length or too meagrely, and so forth. All these reasonings are "rubbish which comes from the devil." This letter will be of use to her for the rest of her life;

it will tell her how she ought to make to her superiors the reports they ask for. Eulalie knows well that they hold to her the place of God: even should they require difficult things this God of goodness would always be with her to help her, but in the present instance the thing was not difficult.

In the Christmas week the Community went into retreat, while Julie, in order to leave her Sisters free for it, took upon herself all the work of the house even to the office of cook. The Exercises were preached by the Vicar-General, and he brought with him the first draft of the new Rules, for M. de Sambucy, too busy to see the matter through himself, had transferred the task to M. Cottu. These Rules had been largely drawn from those of former religious of Notre-Dame, founded in the seventeenth century by Blessed Jeanne de Lestonnac. It was putting new wine into old bottles, and the first glance made it evident to the two Mothers that no understanding between the parties would be possible. Yet a peace which they could not explain to themselves filled their souls, with an increased attachment to the first Rules to which they had bound themselves by vow, and a deep conviction that no others would ever bring them grace or blessing.*

It seemed, nevertheless, prudent to give no

* *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 13.

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decisive answer off-hand, but to try and gain time without displeasing authorities. So, in returning the manuscript to the Vicar-General, they asked him to give them a year to consider the matter. But delay did not chime in with the Bishop's plans; they were told that the new Rules must be accepted forthwith, and that the vows would be taken in accordance with them on the feast of the Annunciation.† The two servants of God held their peace.

† *Ibid.* vol. II, p. 31.



THE CHOIR OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL

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CHAPTER XII

Into Harbour

THE year 1809 dawned under a lowering sky. The Servant of God had been forbidden to show herself at the Bishop's house without an express summons. Once, indeed, the summons had come, and the stormy scene had proved too much even for her heroic courage; language, tone, gesture, had all been so vehement, that her nerves had been unstrung by the shock even while the depths of her patient soul remained unruffled. When Mère Blin de Bourdon, who had waited for her hard by, met her as she came out of the palace, the Blessed Mother was in tears—the first she had shed during all the bitter persecution.

Nevertheless, M. Cottu now bade the two Foundresses go and offer to Mgr. Demandolx their good wishes for the New Year. But the Bishop descried them from his window, and at once sent out his valet to say that he would not receive them. "How," asks Mère Blin de Bourdon, "how could a prelate otherwise so estimable and virtuous, treat with such rigour one whose

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sole desire was to do good in his diocese?" To Julie's glorious Faith the answer was simple enough; in all this, as she used to say, she discerned *something of God's*. "The good God will do all kinds of things," she had kept repeating to her companion in her own simple and familiar language; "we shall be quite astonished. We must not worry; He will manage it all. There will come *a stroke of His Hand*. I look upon it as already done. Light will break, we shall see a road open up before us." So this fresh rebuff only made her tighten her clasp on God's Hand by intenser prayer and yet more total abandonment.

On the eve of the Epiphany, she was pouring forth her soul before the tabernacle, when a strong interior movement pressed her to turn for illumination and deliverance to the Infant Jesus. Gathering around her the six oldest Sisters—prudence and charity had kept from all but these the secret of the domestic difficulties—she began with them to the Babe of Bethlehem a solemn novena of prayer and penance and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. On the fifth day a flood of holy consolation filled her soul, and she said to Mère Blin de Bourdon: "I have no shadow of anxiety left, I am in perfect peace. The Child Jesus has taken us under His protection; He will deliver us."

Externally the situation became hourly more

strained. Answering the New Year's wishes of her Sisters at Montdidier on January 10, Julie wrote: "Our Lord's wish is that our Institute should be founded on the Cross; it is His gift to us at the present moment. . . . We are praying much to God to know His holy Will. Whatever happens I shall never forsake you."

The next day, the seventh of the novena, M. Cottu arrived at the Rue Neuve at a very early hour. "We must come to an agreement, ladies," he said to Julie in excited tones. "His lordship says that Mme. Blin may at any moment take it into her head to carry off her property and leave him to support the community; that he cannot afford to do this; and that he shall take away your chaplain and establish no Rules unless she settle her income on the Amiens convent."

"Father," answered Julie quietly, "this is a question which concerns Mère Blin. I will fetch her, and you can repeat to her, if you wish, what you have just said to me."

Mère St-Joseph, who was in the adjoining room, came at once, and the Vicar-General did repeat, though with something less of heat, the Bishop's message. The Mothers asked time to reflect before giving a decisive answer to so serious a proposal. The question at issue was whether in the interests of the single house at Amiens, where their work was systematically

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thwarted and they were beset with never-ending difficulties, they were to shut off all the other foundations from help and succour. Was this indeed God's Will? Was it for His greater glory?

To these two, weighing things in the balance of the sanctuary, and looking back over the long chain of circumstances which had bound them to their first Rules, it did not seem so. Holy and learned ecclesiastics whom they consulted judged as they. Even M. de Sambucy was not in favour of an unmodified affirmative; he thought that part only of the income of Mère Blin de Bourdon should suffice for Amiens. But Julie's clear good sense refused to compromise; she saw the futility of half-measures, and cut the suggestion short with an energetic "All or nothing, Father."

And now over Namur itself gathered black clouds which, coming to join themselves to those which hung over the Institute at Amiens, closed in ever deepening darkness round the valiant heart there, which yet quailed not, because she knew that "the Lord's ways are in a tempest and a whirlwind, and clouds are the dust of His feet."*

Sister Xavier was rapidly nearing her end; the class-mistresses were no longer able to cope with the increase of work consequent on the sudden influx of new pupils since the removal to the Rue des Fossés and were breaking down one after

* *Nahum*, 1, 3.

another. In the midst of these exterior difficulties, far from their Superior-General, for the most part young and inexperienced, the poor Sisters had fallen victims to the contagion of a universal discouragement, and the enemy of souls, seeing his opportunity, now fell upon many of them, alike at Amiens and Namur, with terrible and violent temptations. We do not wonder to hear that Julie set all down to her own sins; but Mère St-Joseph saw in the fearful trials of these days "the terrific rage of Satan against the new Congregation."*

M. Cottu, it might be thought, was hardly likely to prove an unprejudiced adviser; but to Julie's eye of faith the good priest was her appointed Superior, and she consulted him without hesitation, representing to him the necessity of another journey to Namur. The Vicar-General opined that, in the face of such critical circumstances, there could be no want of respect or obedience to the Bishop in setting off even without his permission; he considered it impossible for the Foundresses to remain longer in Amiens; he acknowledged that they were bound by no engagement to stay in the diocese, and went so far as to suggest that Mère Blin de Bourdon should go first to Namur and thence write to invite the Superior-General and the Sisters to follow her.

* *Memoirs*, Vol. II, p. 45.

Such a plan, however, was hardly in accordance with the transparent straightforwardness of Julie's dealings, so she redoubled her prayers and austerities, and, as she writes on January 11 to Sister Eulalie, "waited for *the moment of the Lord*." "My dear child," she says, "our Institute must be built on the foundation of the Cross. Oh yes, there must be great crosses for rising congregations destined to further God's greater glory. Let us accept the sorrows which come to us from the hand of our good Father. Let us rest quietly in His blessed will, submitting for love of Him to all manner of privations." Then, alluding to the impending necessity of leaving Amiens: "We are trying to act in a spirit of the utmost moderation, so as to make no noise about it. But when once God wills it, nothing shall keep us back."

The same day, after mature consideration, Mère Blin gave in her final answer to the Bishop, formally declining his proposal: on the morrow the Vicar-General read to the Foundresses, by his Lordship's command, an episcopal document to the effect that "having leased to Mère Julie Billiart the house in the Faubourg-Noyon for a community of Sisters of Notre-Dame, and seeing that she was leading the Sisters by a different spirit, he left her free to withdraw into whatever diocese she pleased; that as for himself he would take back the house and form in it true Sisters of



PICTURE OF THE INFANT JESUS WHICH
HUNG IN BLESSED JULIE'S ROOM

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Notre-Dame." M. Cottu added by word of mouth that she was to take all her daughters with her.*

The "moment of the Lord" had come. The Servant of God had made no effort to quit the diocese of Amiens, and now its gates are opened to her by other hands, and under the shadow of the Cross she is to pass out of the city she had loved. The novena, begun on the eve of the first Friday of the year, closed the next day.

In the Mother-House at Namur is still shown a picture of the Infant Jesus which hung for a long time in Julie's room. The memory of that momentous novena has been perpetuated in the Institute; the devotion to the Sacred Infancy flourishes in its houses, and the 25th of each month is honoured with special devotions in its schools. And every year, on Christmas Day, the Sisters of Notre-Dame begin a novena around the crib of the little King who, just a century ago, made for them the crooked way straight and the rough places plain.

Mère St-Joseph confesses in her *Memoirs* that, for her own part, she wished the Servant of God to set off at once, in the very natural fear of a counter-order; but that Julie, on her guard against any too natural eagerness, and wishing, so to speak,

* *Memoirs*, Vol. II, p. 46. *Positio super dubio, etc. Vitæ synopsis.*

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to leave Providence time to confirm or annul its indications, delayed yet a few days.

After the mid-day meal on that January 12 which had brought her sentence, she laid the whole state of affairs before the assembled community, and, having done so, told the Sisters that she left them absolutely free to go or stay. Then came a repetition of the enthusiastic outburst of some weeks back: every Sister cried that she would follow her Mother, the voice of Victoire being among the loudest. "If I remain," she said vehemently, "it will be because they have imprisoned me. I will follow our Mother wherever she goes."

But obstacles were now put in the way of the departure. We have said that the Foundress was told to take all her daughters with her. Objections, however, were raised in regard of Sister Gertrude (Ciska Steenhaut), of whom M. de Sambucy had a high opinion and on whom he founded his hopes for the future, and Mère Julie finally consented that she should remain, promising at the same time that full liberty should be left to every Sister to act as she thought best. Later in the day Ciska was summoned to the Vicar-General's house. "My child," said Mère Julie to her at the door, "I leave you mistress of your choice. Consider it carefully." But for Ciska there was no need for reflection in the matter of her vocation,

and she answered eagerly, "Ah! *ma Mère*, my mind is made up. Nothing can make me change it. I am yours for life." Julie smiled tenderly: "Go then; I feel that God will be with you. Speak little." And so in M. Cottu's room the following dialogue took place:

"You are aware of course that your Mother is leaving; what is your opinion about that?"

"I shall go with her, Father."

"But you will lose your soul, my child, you are on the wrong road; *Mère Julie* is labouring under a delusion."

"I belong to my Mother, I shall follow her."

"Do you know that you are disobeying his Lordship?"

"I shall follow my Mother."

M. de Sambucy was next called in. He spoke to Ciska at much length of the judgements of God, and of the terrors which would assail her at the hour of death if she persisted; he warned her that Mgr. Demandolx would certainly get his friend the Bishop of Ghent to send her back to him. But Ciska only reiterated with modest firmness, "I shall follow my Mother." "But, my child, you are listening to nature, mere nature. I tell you *Mère Julie* is the victim of delusion. I have light to guide you. I have grace to direct your soul. Were you at confession I should speak much more strongly." But Ciska showed no wish

to go to confession, and when finally the compromise of a four days' delay was suggested, burst out with a spirited "No, no! if I stayed, you would give me another Mother."

The interposition of the Bishop was now deemed necessary for the conquest of this child of seventeen, and M. Cottu took her over to his palace, with many a stop on the way thither, to threaten or persuade. "Sister Ciska," he began, as soon as they were introduced into Mgr. Demandolx's presence, "has some doubts about going with Mère Julie." The little Sister muttered between her teeth that she had no doubt at all, and met all the questions of the Bishop as to her intentions by the old refrain, "I belong to my Mother; I will never leave her." His Lordship told her she was an ignorant girl who did not know her catechism, and the Vicar-General even stooped to try and win her by the promise of employment as mistress in the *pensionnat*. But allurements were as much lost on the staunch Flemish spirit as threats, and Ciska was more amused than flattered by the offer. "I should be very little good there, Father," she said; "I know next to nothing." At last the Bishop, getting angry, dismissed her with harsh words and without his blessing.

She used to say later that not once throughout the threefold attack had she been either troubled or shaken; God, who had instantaneously knit

her soul to Julie's at the feet of Mgr. de Beaumont, kept her in perfect peace.

Before the end of the day M. de Sambucy played one more card by writing to threaten Julie with the anger of the Bishop of Ghent, whose friendship he boasted of. But Mgr. de Broglie's eyes had, as Julie knew, already been opened, and were to be so yet more.

Finally, on Saturday, January 14, the Abbé brought to the convent a letter, unsealed and unaddressed, which he declared to have been written to the Foundress by the Bishop, but which, nevertheless, instead of putting into her hands, he chose to read aloud himself. It conveyed a double order: first, that she should oblige Sisters Ciska and Clotilde and Mère Victoire to remain at Amiens, whether they wished or not; secondly, that she should take nothing with her either from the house or the chapel.

As the greater part of the furniture, and almost everything which the chapel contained, had either been brought with her by Mme. Blin or purchased by her, the measure was an injustice, and the Foundress therefore defended the rights of her Congregation; but she did so with the utmost moderation, gentleness and charity, even consenting to leave behind her the ciborium and valuable tabernacle which had been personal and unconditional gifts from Mme. de Franssu to her

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friend Mère Blin de Bourdon. "It came into my head," she said to the latter two days later, "that they are keeping back the holy tabernacle from us even as the Philistines kept back the ark, and that, like the ark, it will be restored to us."

It was settled between the Mothers that Julie should be the first to leave, with five Sisters, Mère Blin de Bourdon staying behind to pack such movable property as was worth the transport, and to send off, in successive detachments, all those who adhered to their first resolve. Judging by the general dispositions, it seemed unlikely that any Sisters would remain; but Julie foresaw that Victoire at least would falter, and accordingly prescribed with decision to Mère St-Joseph the course to be followed with such as separated themselves from the Foundresses. "They are not to be regarded as ours," she said. "It is just to give them the refusal of any goods that may suit them, but make no gifts, for our duty is to the community which we are transferring to Namur. Rest assured that between it and that of Amiens there will be nothing in common. And yet," she added in her large charity, "if indeed there is to be a community here, I pray the good God with all my heart to shower His blessings upon it. We must be glad to know that good is done anywhere and everywhere."

In the meantime Mgr. Pisani had been told by



TABERNACLE AND CRUCIFIX BELONGING TO
BLESSED JULIE

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Mère Blin de Bourdon how matters stood, and on Saturday, January 14, M. Minsart answered on behalf of his Bishop that he would gladly welcome the whole community for God's glory and the good of souls. "As for myself," wrote the kindly chaplain, "I am ardently longing to see the arrival at Namur of yourself and your companions, hoping, as I do, that upon it shall rest the blessing of God."

When this comforting message came, Julie had left Amiens. Mme. de Franssu had often said of her admiringly, "How many things Mère Julie gets through, and yet how much time she gives to each thing," and now, in the peace of God, which was the real secret of her astonishing energy, she made her preparations for the exodus. In three days all was ready. She went round the classes distributing medals to the pupils as she did every month; her manner was as winning, her face as bright and calm as ever, and not a child guessed that this was her farewell.

Sunday dawned, January 15. The reader may remember the child Michaëlie, whose voice had been the first to publish Julie's miraculous cure. She was now a girl of fourteen, and, intensely attached to those with whom she had lived so long, had obtained her father's consent to follow them into exile. But now, almost at the moment of departure, she was lured away to speak to M. de Sambucy.

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As she left the house, the door of the refectory, where the travellers were assembled, opened, and Julie, without turning her head, said aloud: "She who is coming in will take Michaëlie's place." It was Sister Bernardine, one of Canon Bicheron's two nieces, the Adèle Pelletier who, with her little bell, had gathered together the first poor children in the streets of Amiens. She was only sixteen, but Mère Julie had a high opinion of her. On the day when she had knocked at the gate in the Rue Neuve, asking admission, another postulant was leaving, one whose loss Mère St-Joseph regretted on account of her talents. But Julie said to her: "Other things than talent are needed to do good in the Institute," and then, as the door-bell tinkled, "She who is about to enter will render great glory to God in our Society." Adèle, on her side, was warmly attached to the Saint; she had resisted the efforts of her parents to induce her to enter some other Order, and throughout the persecution of these years had kept her loyalty unchanged. Many were the stories she would tell in her old age of the Amiens days and her beloved Mother, and of those famous explanations of the Catechism when, speaking of the love of God, or of the injury done to Him by sin, she could not keep back her tears. The seed then sown had fallen on good ground in Adèle's case; Sister Bernardine lived as a



THE CLOCK TOWER AT AMIENS

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Saint, and died in the odour of sanctity at Fleurus.

One o'clock had just chimed from the tower of the beautiful cathedral when, for the last time, Mère Julie stood in the midst of the assembled community in that city of Amiens where she had suffered so many tribulations, received so many graces. In a voice broken by tears she bade them briefly farewell, and then, while all her daughters wept around her, she and her five companions got into the cart which was to be their travelling equipage and took the high road to Belgium.

The journey, which lasted a whole week, was painful enough, for the cold was intense.

"Here we are, thanks be to God, at Doullens," she wrote to Mère St-Joseph on the evening of the first day; "very cold, but very courageous, in great peace and union with our Lord Jesus Christ. May the divine love of our dear Jesus set all hearts on fire! My little travelers are brimful of the spirit of God. How glad one is to be cold when one's heart is warmed by the charity of Jesus Christ!"

The severe frosts had rendered the roads dangerously slippery, and the horses could hardly move a step without falling, so that the poor Sisters were compelled to trudge on foot through snow and ice for five or six hours. But Mère Julie led the way, and her bright courage com-

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municated itself to the little band as they trod in her footprints. They cheated the length of the way by saying the rosary aloud, and by singing, with voices whose freshness and enthusiasm lent to the lines a poetry which of themselves they could hardly boast, the verse of a quaint old hymn in honour of the Apostles:

Let us hasten, let us run
To every clime beneath the sun;
Let us brave the frost and snow
And praise the God who loves us so.*

The times of silence were punctually observed, spiritual exercises were duly made; and when an amelioration in the road allowed of getting back into the coach, one of the party read aloud a spiritual book. Except for north wind and ice, one might have fancied it was St. Theresa and her daughters on their way to some new Carmelite foundation. Like the Carmelites, too, Our Lady's Sisters had their little adventures.

Mère Julie had placed the journey under the protection of the holy Angels, and more than once in its course did she and her children feel their powerful protection. The following incident,

* Allons, courons porter nos pas
Dans tous les lieux où l'on respire;
Affrontons glaces et verglas,
Louons ce Dieu qui nous inspire.
—*Cantique sur les Apôtres assemblés.*

which occurred on the frontier, is recorded by Père Sellier, S.J., who had it from the Servant of God herself:

One evening the coachman, whom the delays consequent on the severe weather had put into a very bad temper, drew up before a wretched looking little inn, standing by itself in the midst of fields. On entering, Mère Julie saw sitting at table with the master of the house some men of sinister appearance, who looked at the Sisters, and then left the inn saying that they would return shortly. It flashed upon her immediately that she had fallen into a den of thieves. Not to awaken suspicion, however, she accepted the frugal supper which was set before her in plates of very questionable cleanliness, and then went a little way along the high road to explore the surroundings. As she walked on, lifting her heart to God in earnest prayer, she suddenly saw before her a youth of dignified and modest bearing, who accosted her with these words: "Ah! this is not the place for you! go further on. Fly from this house!" She wished to question her kind friend, but he had disappeared. She was retracing her steps, full of what had occurred, when two of her Sisters ran to meet her saying, "*Ma Mère*, we have just seen a kind and venerable old woman who said to us, 'Ah! Sisters, this is not the place for you, go further on. Fly from this

house.' We wanted to bring her to you, but she disappeared."

Evidently this was a warning from heaven; but how were they to get away? It was late, the horses had been taken out, the luggage removed from the coach, the rooms and beds—such as they were—prepared, and all the travellers were overcome with fatigue. No matter: they must leave there and then. Mère Julie went to rouse the driver, and, by means of kind words and a little present of money, persuaded him to push on further. She then asked to see the bedrooms, and when the host pointed to the two wretched couches in the single apartment of which the would-be inn consisted, telling her that he and his family would pass the night in the loft, she said that she could not consent to such an arrangement, and would seek a more comfortable lodging elsewhere. "At the same instant," to use her own words to Père Sellier, "and without our being able to explain it otherwise than by the intervention of the blessed Angels, my daughters with all their packages were somehow or other in their places in the coach, the horses, moreover, put to, and only waiting for the signal to start. We pursued our way rapidly in spite of loud opposition from the innkeeper, and in a short time we reached a village where we were able to pass the night without mishap. When I con-

sidered all the circumstances of this event, and above all the very rapid manner in which we had got off from that inn, I could not help seeing in it the Hand of Divine Providence, who by means of His Angels had delivered us from a great danger."*

When the people of the neighbouring village learnt what had happened, they congratulated the Sisters on having escaped from a regular nest of brigands, and a house of such ill repute that for some time past the eyes of the police had been upon it. Sister Bernardine, the last survivor of Mère Julie's companions on this journey, used to love to tell the story to a younger generation; she was one of the two whom the old woman had bid to fly.†

On another day the coach stuck in deep ruts full of half-melted ice, and the travellers had to get out of the cumbersome vehicle, and walk on in front. Worn out by fatigue and hunger, they reached a small hamlet; but Mère Julie was not going to let her daughters choose their quarters at random; rest was not rest to her if she was not in the company of the friends of her God. And so Sister Bernardine draws a charming picture for us of how she went down the village street with fixed gaze and thoughtful air, her footsteps guided,

* Father Sellier's notice of the Servant of God.

† See *Father Baesten's Life*, and cf. testimony of Sister M. Bernard Bochkoltz, p. 9.

we may well believe, by those Angels who had once already so well borne her up in their hands—passing by this door with “Not here,” and that other with “No! God is not there,” until at last she stopped before a poor-looking house saying, “This is the place. Let us knock.” The door was opened at once, and the good village woman, at the sight of the large black cloaks, cried out joyfully, “Nuns! Oh, what a joy to see nuns once more! I thought there were none left on earth. Joseph,” she called to her husband, “come and see the nuns;” and then to her little son, “Kneel down, Nicholas, to get their blessing.” Delighted to offer them hospitality, these good and simple folk spread the table with milk and bread, and Julie sat talking to them, as she so well knew how to do, of God and the happiness of knowing and loving Him. Nicholas had volunteered to watch in the meantime on the high-road for the coach, and stop it. “But our Mother,” adds the narrator, “knew the ways of children, and did not trust too much to Nicholas. Well for her that she did not, for just as she herself went to the door she beheld our equipage rolling away beyond the house,” and the faithless little sentinel, ashamed of his neglect, had to run after it.

Charity and joy go hand in hand, and the party kept its peace and gaiety throughout all the little hazards of the way. To some of the young French

Sisters a journey to Belgium seemed a journey into an almost savage country, and Ciska must have laughed heartily when, on reaching Courtrai, one of them gravely said to her Superior: "Please show me a Fleming, *ma Mère*." She herself, who had gone through so valiant a struggle not to leave her Mother, was overjoyed at seeing once again the fertile plains and the old belfry-towers of her native land, and proud to point out its beauties to her companions.

At last, on the evening of St. Agnes's feast, the white walls and grassy ramparts of Namur came in sight. Next morning the party was joined by the second carayan, composed of the more delicate Sisters under the leadership of Sister Jeanne Godelle, the Mistress of Novices. Their coach had left Amiens three days after the first, but having had a more intelligent driver, had taken a shorter route.

But Mère Julie's cup was seldom one of un-mixed sweetness. The Bishop of Amiens, anxious to justify his measures towards the Foundress, had lost no time in drawing up a detailed list of his grievances in her regard, and "the packet," says Mère Blin de Bourdon, "arrived before she did." And so, when she presented herself at the Bishop's house, Mgr. Pisani received her coldly, reproached her with moving a whole community in the depth of winter, and told her that she had come unin-

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vited and without informing him of her plans. "Take care, Sister," said the prelate sternly; "there have been persons who have had revelations, and who have lost their souls."

Fortunately, Mère Blin's letter of the 14th was found annulling the second charge, while the formal dismissal by Mgr. Demandolx and the letter bearing the signature of his Vicar-General sufficiently explained the precipitate departure from Amiens in so rigorous a season.

But the good Bishop naturally hesitated to annoy his colleague, and, moreover, the grave complaints of the latter did not admit of being so easily disposed of. Two whole hours were spent in examining them; but at the end of the interrogatory Mgr. Pisani was not only convinced of the innocence of the Servant of God, but deeply impressed by her humility and charity, her patience and courage.

Nevertheless, he thought well during the next few days to examine the Sisters individually and minutely. As we have already said, Julie's charitable prudence had left them, up to the last moment, in ignorance of the contradictions at Amiens; even now, they had only the vaguest and most general notion of the state of affairs. As for it being possible to accuse their Mother of harshness or rigidity towards themselves, such an idea could never have entered their minds.

Their frank surprise and the childlike transparency of their answers delighted the bishop, and were to him the full and final justification of the Foundress. For some months yet M. de Sambucy continued to besiege him with letters, but they awakened no doubts in his mind and he never swerved from his loyal attachment to the Sisters of Notre-Dame. "I asked for three of them," he said to a friend at this time, "and here I find myself with thirty on my hands. I rejoice at it, and I bear them all in my heart, for they will transform my good town of Namur. They have the hearts of Apostles and a courage which does not know what difficulty means."

Mère Julie's account of the matter to her intimate friend betrays no trace of rancour or complaint:

"His Lordship showed me all the letters that had been written to him. It did one good to hear them! I kissed the Hand of my God. I, too, showed him the letter written to me by the bishop of Amiens. These details are for yourself alone. After a rather long conversation with him, his Lordship had the kindness to invite me to dine with him. I am lost in astonishment at the mercies of God towards me."

Still less is there any tone of triumph at the issue of the affair.

"If you could have heard the letters written

about me to the Bishop of Namur! There was enough in them to send me to prison for, then and there. His Lordship is not the least surprised at all this, and he was good enough to read me his own letter to the Bishop of Amiens. Tell our *bonne dame** that, if she could hear him, it would be balm to her heart. A bishop of twenty-five years' standing would not let himself be imposed upon by a poor little Mère Julie. Oh, no. Besides, I make no effort at all to convince him; he gets his information from the letters that have been written to him, and not *one* only. It was the good God Himself Who took our cause in hand. . . . Oh! yes, He would rather have sent an Angel to us from Heaven than have allowed us to fall into delusion, for we only wished, you and I, to do His blessed Will. We knew that He is faithful to His promises, and in Him we placed all our trust.

“His Lordship bids me tell you to do as I did: leave free those who wish to remain, but if all wish to come, bring all. The house is large enough to contain them; and if God increases our numbers, He will extend our walls. O holy and adorable Will of God, be thou for ever accomplished!”

She renews the counsel to act very gently in the matter of the Amiens property, and sends special messages of affection to Mère Victoire. As

* Mme. de Franssu.

for her "eldest daughter" herself, she hopes that God will make her strong with His strength through the Heart of Jesus. Everything has happened by His permission. Blessed be His Holy Name!

"Courage, my dear friend! God is very good thus to make us pass through the furnace of tribulation. Is it possible that God should forsake those who have been, so to say, forced to quit their beloved solitude in order to go to the assistance of poor little souls plunged in darkness, deprived of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us ask Mary our Mother to get us a great love of humiliations; what a happiness it would be for us to follow her Son Jesus!"

Mère Blin de Bourdon stood in need of this language of faith and hope. Every effort was being made at Amiens to persuade her that Mère Julie was in error, that she would fail in her attempt, and would return to ask pardon; and the necessity in which she found herself of differing from her ecclesiastical superiors was torture to her delicate conscience.

Hardly had the door closed upon Julie and her companions than she had been summoned in haste to the house of M. Cottu, together with Mère Jeanne the mistress of novices, under pretext of urgent communications. Nothing of any

importance, however, had been communicated, and she found on her return that the visit had only been designed to give M. de Sambucy a free field while he terrorized the young Sisters. "Ah! my dear Mother," she wrote on the very evening of the 15th, "how difficult of explanation are the ways of men, or rather, I should say, how wonderful are the ways of God." Then, detailing the points of the Abbé's discourse, "it would be quicker," she says, "to tell you what he left unsaid than what he said." Even Victoire had been indignant to hear the Foundress represented as unjustly carrying off with her the property of others.

"One is very free," she writes bravely but sadly at the end of her long letter, "when one has no wish but to do God's will. At heart I am really at peace, and I believe that all this is meant to purify the work. I cannot regard these vexations as an evil, since sin is the only evil. Yet I suffer exteriorly. . . . I should like to be able to hurry matters so as to be soon with you again. . . . I hope that things will go more smoothly elsewhere for the glory of God, which must be our sole aim. . . . Pray that I may not make any blunders, as I am quite capable of doing. Best love to all the dear Sisters. How I long to see them again!"

Two days later another assault was made by the Superior of the Seminary, a certain M. Dailainville, a successful missionary whose herculean

figure, stentorian voice and vehement gesticulation ministered to an ardent zeal not always tempered by equal prudence. He had been informed at the episcopal palace of all the supposed delinquencies of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. Without further inquiry, he went straight to the half-empty house, and began to apostrophize Mère Blin de Bourdon with the utmost energy on the subject of the Foundress. He himself felt no doubt whatsoever; Mère Julie was the victim of a delusion; the Sisters were on the wrong road; they would not be blessed by God; they would fail in all they undertook. He next betook himself to poor Mme. de Franssu, on whom he discharged a second battery of eloquence. Of a nervous and oversensitive temperament, and a conscience naturally timorous, already deeply distressed by the prospect of being separated from the dear friends with whom she had hoped to end her days, the poor lady's mind was nearly thrown off its balance with terror at all she heard. The nuns were a set of refractory women; they were the victims of the most deplorable delusions; they lay under suspicion of heresy; they had already fallen into the abyss. It was her conscientious duty to give them no sign of approval, to take side against them to anyone who should speak about them, and to tell Mère Victoire that she was bound to remain where she was.

On hearing of this incident, Julie wrote gravely:

"Before speaking of illusion, people ought to have ground for what they say. Courage, courage! Like St. Paul, let us only glory in crosses and humiliations. My dear child, the thought strikes me that we are beginning to be really *Sisters of Notre-Dame*. Crosses are pouring in upon us on all sides. 'It is only now,' said St. Ignatius the Martyr, when he was found worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, 'it is only now that I begin to be a Christian.' Ah, my dear friend, how happy we are! What a joy it is to have something to suffer for God during the little space of this short life!"

And again:

"I know how you are suffering; but do not worry, let us kiss the Hand of our good Father. . . . Many very holy persons see in all that is happening signs of adorable designs of God in our regard. My God and His blessed will, that is all I wish! there I place your heart and mine, my dear. All this hubbub does not reach to my heart. Everything is in commotion, and I see the good God making use of all this for His own purposes. Everywhere people's tongues are busy with a poor little grandmother Julie, whilst she is thinking of nobody but those with whom the good God

has associated her to carry the cross of her dear Jesus. . . . Let us cast ourselves into God alone, let us anchor ourselves on Him alone—there is true peace of soul.”

Mère St-Joseph writes:

“We stand in sore need of comfort. How long the days seem! Though I am kept very busy, I cannot but say that my position is very painful; but God gives me health and courage. What a happy day that will be which shall carry me back to the side of my dear Mother and in the midst of my good Sisters!”

And Julie answers at once:

“Courage, dear friend, courage! . . . The good God will be our strength; let us keep very close to Him, very close to His Heart. . . . He will take our cause in hand, it is His work, and it is for Him we labour. Courage! one thing at a time, and all the rest cast into the bosom of God.”

Mère Blin de Bourdon's sufferings increased with every day of the long seven weeks. Calumny did its work; not only M. de Sambucy, but other priests refused her absolution. For a short time her old and sincerely attached friend, Mme. de Franssu, shaken by all the pressure put upon her, showed herself chilled and distant. Persistent

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efforts were being made to tamper with the little communities at Rubempré and Montdidier. Victoire adhered to her first decision till the end of January, but it needed a far stronger nature than hers to make head in the teeth of such a storm, and on the 30th she wrote a letter to Julie, piteous in its affection and its weakness, beseeching her still to keep her in her heart and prayers, to let her write to her, and to believe in the unchangeable attachment of "your poor daughter Victoire."

By February threats and promises had won the day, and side by side in the house in the Faubourg-Noyon were to be seen two communities, separated at meals and recreation, the new one being gathered around Mère Victoire. Julie writes:

"So Sister Victoire is going to stay at Amiens; I am not surprised—all as God wills! Tell her that she knows all the affection my soul holds for her. She will always find me the same, my heart does not change. As for the Sisters of Montdidier, I have written to tell them that I leave them free to do whatever God shall inspire them, and that my heart shall be ever open to them."

For Mère St-Joseph herself she has more virile comforts:

"Since we must drink the chalice to the dregs, let us drink it, dear friend. I seem to see your

soul growing by means of all these painful shocks. These are capital days for heaven. Courage! go to the God of all strength and of all consolation."

Mère Blin de Bourdon had some difficulty in disembarassing herself of the lease for the house in the Faubourg-Noyon, or in getting permission at least to sublet it, as this was not mentioned in the terms of the contract. The difficulty was placed in the hands of Our Lady by the communities of Namur and Amiens, and Mgr. Demandolx at last came to understand that, as he had himself sent away the Sisters, they could not be expected to pay for a house which they were no longer allowed to inhabit.

On January 31, six more Sisters set out for Belgium, and Julie writes word that the Sisters had "jumped for joy" at hearing of their coming, that they had arrived, as she prettily says, "*quite fresh, as if they had just come from meditation,*" and that the bishop had received them with great kindness. She hopes that Mère St-Joseph will soon follow in spite of all the obstacles that are being put in her way. As for all that is being said against herself at Amiens, she cannot help laughing at it.

But Mgr. Pisani did not laugh. He wrote a letter of eight pages to M. de Sambucy, refuting the charges against the Foundress, and finally cut matters short by sending an explicit order to

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Mère Blin de Bourdon to return immediately to Namur. She was not slow to obey. In one of her last letters she says, alluding to the sudden flood of consolation she had experienced when Julie was leaving Namur to go to Bordeaux:

"I see now that it indeed came from God. We are together again, and together at Namur—that Namur which seemed meant to separate us for ever. I am still ready, indeed, to be separated from you for the glory of God, but I think somehow that He wants us to be much together, and at least I wish it so."

At last, on March 1, 1809, she left France with Sister Angélique Sachy and a postulant. In the Mother-House at Namur is still venerated the little statue of St. Michael which they carried with them, and which perhaps helped to bring them thither without mishap. Five days after their arrival Sister Xavier died. And so there remained at Amiens only two, Mère Victoire and a certain Sister Clothilde.

We can look back now over the long storm which transplanted the tree of the Institute without bitterness or regret; and no words can more fitly close the record of it than the wise and charitable judgment of Mère Blin de Bourdon herself:



NAMUR: AT THE JUNCTION OF THE SAMBRE AND MEUSE
From the Western Ramparts

"In all this affair there was a tissue of errors and misunderstandings on the part of persons full of zeal and piety. In occurrences of this sort we have to adore God's permission, not to judge the the persons concerned. Moreover, the mistakes, the inconsistencies, the precipitations, of which God makes use for the fulfilment of His designs are easily pardoned by Him afterwards when they do not proceed—and we know that these did not proceed—from an evil intention."

One of the witnesses in the Process of Beatification, giving his testimony to the heroism of of Julie's fortitude, used these significant words:

"St. Peter of Alcantara used to say of St. Theresa that the brightest aureola of her sanctity was the contradiction of the good. I do not think that St. Theresa met with greater contradiction from the good than did Mère Julie. Bishops and other authorities were against her, yet she remained ever true to herself, calm and serene, because she sought God alone."

CHAPTER XIII

The Mother-House at Namur

READERS of Macaulay's history will remember his description of the picturesque town, whose impregnable citadel crowns the steep rock which, jutting out at the apex of the triangle formed by the junction of the Sambre and Meuse, "looks down on a boundless expanse of corn-fields, woods and meadows," with the clean and cheerful-looking little city in their midst. The view from the hill-fort is very beautiful. To the north the glittering waters of the Meuse extend till they are lost beneath the grey rocks of Marche-les-Dames; to the west lie the fertile plains of Brabant; to the east the Condroz—the granary of Belgium and the frontier of the Ardennes; while to the south the view ranges over the district of "Entre Sambre et Meuse," covered with waving forests till it is closed by the high promontories of the upper valley. To the visitor who sails down the Meuse from Dinant the fortress is still a conspicuous object, but the strong walls and gateways, on which the eyes of Julie's exiled daughters rested, have disappeared, de-

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molished by William of Orange, their memory alone surviving in such names as *Porte St-Nicolas*, where now no gate is to be seen.

The taking of the town and its maiden fortress by Louis XIV, and its retaking by William III in 1695 are probably the only claims to interest which Namur possesses for most Englishmen. But for Christian hearts it has other and nobler associations than the great siege and the neighbourhood of *Soignies* and *Waterloo*. In the Church of *St-Aubain*, now the Cathedral, a slab of white marble marks the last resting-place of Don Juan of Austria, the hero of *Lepanto*. Beneath the shadow of the same church the Saint of *Corpus Christi*, *Julienne*, Prioress of *Mont-Cornillon* at *Liège*, found a shelter when, driven from her own convent, she took refuge at Namur. Later on she dwelt in the Cistercian abbey of *Salzinnes*, a suburb of Namur, whose church in 1103 was consecrated to Mary by Pope Innocent II in the presence of one of the most devout of Mary's servants, St. Bernard himself. For Namur—and the biographer of *Julie Billiard* loves to note the fact—is pre-eminently Our Lady's city. In the crypt of the collegiate church of *Notre-Dame*, which once stood at the foot of the citadel, was preserved till 1663 a statue of the Virgin Mother, said to have been brought by St. Maternus, disciple of St. Peter, and first apostle of Namur. In

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the episcopal palace may still be seen a painting in which the Dominican, Antoine Havet, first bishop of Namur, who assisted at the Council of Trent, is depicted devoutly kneeling at Our Lady's feet and receiving the beads from her hands; and a confraternity of the Rosary was erected in 1571, the very year of that Rosary-victory, Lepanto.

Twice a year the townspeople honour their patroness and protectress with special and public solemnity. The processions of the feast of the Visitation date back to the twelfth century, while the festivity in honour of the Immaculate Conception, likewise celebrated in July, owes its origin to a vow made by the entire population on occasion of their preservation in the midst of a terrific storm which ceased as soon as the promise was made. The historian who relates this fact attributes the comparative rarity of storms in Namur, and the small amount of injury done by them, to the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. During the disastrous wars which desolated the country under Spanish rule the inhabitants trusted not half so much to native valour or their famous fortress as to her who is "terrible as an army set in battle array." In 1663 they once more solemnly consecrated their city to Mary Immaculate, and bearing her miraculous statue through the streets poised it on the very summit



MOTHER-HOUSE, NAMUR: THE ENTRANCE COURT
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of the fortifications. "In that solitary spot," says the old author, "Mary became at once the refuge of common piety, the Mother of Mercy, the consolation of the afflicted, and the joy of hearts." Nowadays the venerable image stands in a little chapel at the foot of the citadel, but still bears the name of "*Notre-Dame des Remparts*." The good Namurois will suffer no opposition to their immemorial devotion. In 1789 the Emperor Joseph II, nicknamed "the Sacristan," on account of his constant meddling with Church affairs, forbade the procession of Our Lady, and caused a part of the garrison to be drawn up in arms in the Cathedral square to prevent it; but the crowd rushed through the bayonets into the church, seized the holy image and carried it in triumph through the town, ready to shed their blood, if need be, in defence of the Patroness of Namur. It was M. Minsart who, after the Revolution, restored the Chapel of Our Lady of the Ramparts, and by one of those delicate attentions of Providence, which men call coincidence, it was just then that Julie's daughters passed into the gates of Our Lady's city.

The reader will have pardoned us for thus dwelling in some detail on the town which was to be the haven of rest to the little barque so long buffeted by the storm. "Let us go to Namur; it is the usual refuge of exiles." So said St. Julienne

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of Cornillon. Five centuries later it became the refuge of another saintly exile; and Cardinal Dechamps, the holy and learned Bishop of Namur, loved to dwell on this point of resemblance between the two servants of God who were the glory of his diocese.

The Mansion of the Counts Quarré in the Rue des Fossés still stands as it stood in 1809, and the visitor to the Convent sees over the gateway which faces him as he enters the first quadrangle, a stone shield bearing the family arms with the motto *Iter para tutum*. But God has indeed fulfilled Julie's prediction and extended its walls since the Sisters of Notre-Dame first crossed its threshold just a hundred years ago. In the centre of the principal courtyard is the church with its white marble altar, over which bend life-size adoring angels, and its unique collection of relics, which make so magnificent a display when exposed once a year on Relics Sunday. This collection is as antique as it is valuable, having originally been brought over from the Holy Land in the thirteenth century by Cardinal Jacques de Vitry, whose mitre and missal form part of the treasure. At his death it passed to different communities in succession, was hidden during the great Revolution, and bequeathed by the last survivors of the Convent in whose possession it then was to the Sisters of Notre-Dame.

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From the clock-tower of the church the view extends over the whole city. On two sides the church is flanked by the Noviciate and Professed quarters; on the third by the flourishing *Pensionnat* whose little sodality chapel contains a singularly beautiful statue of our Blessed Lady. Still beyond the *Pensionnat* rises the magnificent Poor School, erected in 1905-6 by the late Mother-General Aimée de Jésus Dullaert, as a thank-offering for the Centenary of the Institute. At the east end of the spacious garden, with its terrace walk and its fine old chestnut-trees, stands a little Gothic chapel, to which we shall return later in our narrative. Coming one day at recreation to the spot it now occupies, Julie said to Sister Jeanne Godelle and Sister Gertrude Steenhaut who walked on either side of her: "This is the place where my wretched body shall one day rest." And here indeed repose the blessed remains of her who for seven years sanctified the Mother-House by her presence, and whose spirit still seems to linger within its walls, filling it with an indefinable atmosphere of peace and fervour and joy. The chapel roof is overshadowed by a tree which Mère St-Joseph, when General, was wont to point out to her daughters, saying, "There is the fruit of obedience." For once, as she walked in the garden with the Servant of God and Sister Julienne, there lay across their path a dead and

withered branch. "Daughter," said Julie to Sister Julienne, "pick up that branch, plant it and water it." And the child of obedience had done so, and behold, when the year was closing in, the dead bough sprouted into bud and is now a tall acacia.

We have reached the last period of Blessed Julie Billiart's life—not indeed a decline but rather its "perfect day," the harvest of the long seed-time.

"She looked upon our Mother-House at Namur," say the manuscript *Annals*, "as the centre whence was to radiate that spirit which should pass to the secondary houses; every day she urged the Sisters not to content themselves with a life which fell short of the sublimity of their vocation. . . . 'you must become *living Rules*,' she would say to them, 'for the Sisters who come after you will form themselves on your example.'"

The following are the points [we translate from the *Annals*] which she particularly inculcated on the first Sisters.

1. Try to have your heart always filled and occupied with God, let His will be the centre and mainspring of your actions.
2. See in your Superiors the image of God; be persuaded that obedience is a guide which cannot err.
3. Make use of prayer and mortification, in order to conquer your inordinate inclinations

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and become instruments worthy to be employed for the salvation of souls.

4. Labour unceasingly to advance in the paths of interior perfection, without which our Institute cannot subsist. . . . Consider your vocation well, and you will understand that in the matter of perfection what would not be little for others would be infinitely little for you. "Oh! my children," she would add, "when you thank God for the inestimable gift of your vocation, ask of Him earnestly the courage and strength to fulfil your high destiny." . . . "I conjure you," our good Mother used often to say to us, "I conjure you by the love which you owe to our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect yourselves in virtue and in learning; understand the necessity under which you lie of stretching forward to attain the end of an Institute which not only guides you along the way of salvation, but which obliges you to lead all the children entrusted to you to the knowledge and love of God. Ah! how unworthy of her vocation would she be whom such considerations would not urge to forget herself and her little personal interests, in order to sacrifice herself entirely to the glory of her Saviour. . . . If I had here to sustain the Institute a dozen interior souls who could understand me perfectly, how happy I should be! . . . Then learn, my dear daughters, learn to conquer yourselves, so as to

obtain from the very first that *true spirit* which must guide those who shall come after you. And above all remember to abide and ever to grow in the practice of the precept, 'Love one another.' Labour unremittingly to become holy, for the holier you are the holier will be those who follow you. You ought by your good example to be the *pillars of the Institute*."

The Superior-General herself was indeed this living rule, this perfect example. Distinguished from the rest of the community only by her greater regularity, mortification and fervour, she enjoyed but one privilege—that of daily Communion. Every morning, in spite of age and infirmities, break of day found her kneeling in chapel absorbed during the space of an hour in the deepest contemplation, the fire which burned in her soul betraying itself by the supernatural glow on her countenance. Numbers of eye-witnesses have deposed to her being often rapt in ecstasy, especially during her thanksgiving after Holy Communion; at such times her head was surrounded by a halo of light. For a long time the Servant of God was unconscious of this marvel; as soon as it came to her knowledge, she adopted a larger veil, so arranged that she could drop it over her face during her prayer. This peculiarity may be remarked in all her portraits, and one of these veils is still reverently preserved at Namur.

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No one of the many testimonies to her prayer can carry the weight of that of Mère St-Joseph. "Her face," she says, "was veritably inflamed by her living faith and ardent love for Jesus Christ. It was not simply the recollection of a devout and pious person praying, but her countenance was supernaturalised. . . . When she entered a church, her eyes fastened themselves at once on the Tabernacle which held the Treasure of her soul; then she prostrated herself profoundly, and one would have said that at that moment she lifted the filmy veil which hid her God from her. Hence it was that she enjoyed the privilege of scarcely ever losing the presence of God. . . . Her fervour during the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the pains she took to have the praises of God sung in the actual spirit of faith, spoke more efficaciously to her children than any number of instructions. When she intoned a hymn you would have thought that her very soul was darting forth to heaven, and she transported other even as she herself was transported."

But though she had the word of eminent directors of souls, such as M. Dangicourt, M. de Lamarche, and Fathers Thomas, Varin and Enfantin, that God led her by extraordinary ways, she was well aware that virtue does not consist in sublime contemplation or divine favours. And so she taught her children to walk along the safe path of humble simplicity, bidding them follow for their morning

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meditation the method of St. Ignatius. As for the half-hour which gathers the Sisters of Notre-Dame round the Tabernacle at the close of each day, she would tell them to pass it in a childlike and familiar talk with God, as the Apostles would have talked with Jesus when they returned from the little missions on which He sent them.

Julie had made thoroughly her own that great saying of St. Ignatius which she incorporated into the Rules of her Institute,* that it is from the interior dispositions of the heart that the external works derive all their efficacy.†

In her conferences and exhortations she constantly came back to this true interior life—to mortification, self-conquest, annihilation. She held high and firm before the eyes of her daughters the standard of renunciation, of death to one's will and judgment; but, cheerful giver that she was, she led the way joyously. "Courage, my dear daughters," she would say laughingly, "I only love you to make you die. A strange way that of loving my children, to want to put them to death!"‡

Yet she did not hide from them that these things are in the beginning difficult and painful. "But,"

* Rule; Chap. xvii, Art. 1.

† "Illa enim interiora sunt, ex quibus efficaciam ad exteriora permanere ad finem nobis propositum oportet." *Summ. Constit.*, reg. 16.

‡ Positio super virtutibus: de heroica fortitudine.

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she added in her vigorous and untranslatable simile, "as soon as a soul has given God leave to act with a free hand (*couper en plein drap*), He comes to her assistance. The soul is no longer disturbed by her faults; she knows none of those fears, those anxieties, which are the lot of those who are for ever calculating with God. Many of you act through fear; I cannot lead souls by that road, you know that is not my way. No, God wants generous souls, who serve Him for love. Would you like to know how you may tell really spiritual persons? In their relations with their neighbour. They speak little, they remain united to God; they *lend* themselves to exterior occupations, but *give* themselves never."* And again:

"Ours is one of the most difficult vocations because we must live an interior life in the midst of external work. If that interior life were lost, our Congregation would not last, or if it did live on, it would be only an outward life, by uniformity of customs—even that would soon come to an end. It is in the Mother-House especially that this primitive spirit must shine forth. We were saying to each other not long ago, Sister St-Joseph and I, that if our Sisters do not penetrate themselves with this interior spirit, if in the midst of their occupations they do not keep their hearts

* Conferences of Ven. Mère Julie, written by Sister Gertrude Steenhaut. No. 17.

united to our Lord Jesus Christ, all they do will be worth nothing. No man can give what he has not got."*

Once more :

"My dear Sisters, be persons of prayer. It is impossible to pray well and not to be obedient, not to be charitable. To meditate on the maxims and teaching of Our Lord and not to shape our conduct by them is, says St. James, to be like a man who looks at his face in a glass, and going away presently forgets what manner of man he is. No, no ; those who act thus do not make good meditations ; prayer must bring forth fruit."†

We might multiply quotations indefinitely ; every page of Mère Julie's conferences is full of this virile and solid teaching, expressed in that vivid, simple, persuasive language of hers which not seldom attains to true eloquence. Sister Marie Steenhaut used to say that to hear these masculine instructions, one might have judged her, on the first impression, as rigid and severe. But the same word which stretched thus strongly from end to end knew likewise how to dispose all things sweetly. "After having set before us," says Sister Marie, "the whole extent of religious abnegation, there would dart forth from her heart

* Conferences, No. 21.

† Conferences, No. 18.

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such flashes of devotedness as touched all hearts. Thus one day, she had given a powerful conference on forgetfulness of self, showing that a Sister of Notre-Dame must have a great heart and a soul above all the littlenesses of self-seeking, that she can never listen to herself, that she ought to be greedy of privations, of humiliations, of sufferings, in order to be more like unto Jesus Christ. 'No,' cried the energetic Mother, 'never will I suffer amongst us those souls without courage, those womanish hearts which cannot endure anything. You must be able to set self completely aside in order to devote yourselves unreservedly to the interests of the good God. A religious must not be taken up with a headache, with those thousand and one aches and pains to which we are subject. . . . I must have apostolic souls, souls veritably poor, which, like the Apostle, rejoice in nakedness and suffering.' Then, as she closed her conference, she said: 'My dear daughters, I have explained to you your obligations, but oh! be convinced that if any one of you be in need of something, I will beg from door to door, I will go anywhere and everywhere till I have found what can bring you relief.'"

Sometimes the busy day had not allowed of assembling the Community; then, just before the Sisters retired for the night, Julie would pour into their hearts some of her burning words.

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"Often," say the *Memoirs*, "the fire of a holy zeal would carry her away. . . . With that greatness of soul, that invincible courage, which were her distinctive characteristics, she longed continually to see her children filled with the same zeal. 'O, my dear good daughters,' she said to us one evening, with a majesty in her look and an inspiration in her voice that went through us—'My dear daughters, we need magnanimous souls for our sublime vocation. There must be nothing little among us; we must have the hearts of Apostles. . . . You are the *hinges* on which all the spiritual life of our holy Institute must turn. . . . You are the first, you have the first graces; we must have saints, yes saints, if we are to do the work of God.'"

Well might Mère St-Joseph write:

"The conferences which our Mother gave, and which were the very outflow of her heart, without study and without art, confirm what I advance: that Julie had, to a degree of which God alone has the secret, the spirit, and the virtues, and the maxims of the saints. How, in fact, came it about that an unlettered and uncultured woman should be able to speak for two consecutive hours, powerful alike in her appeal to intellect and to heart, saying always things good and profitable, and oftentimes things of deepest spirituality,



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without the least admixture of anything common or ordinary? Verily, this was more than natural."

It had been impossible, owing to the repairs which the house needed, and which required both time and money, to transform the little oratory into a chapel until the arrival of Sister St-Joseph with the vestments and other necessities. "Oh! bring us our Divine Master," pleads Julie in her letters to her, "bring Him under our roof. Ah! with what love we long for that happy moment." On April 21 Mgr. Pisani said the first Mass in the humble sanctuary, and henceforward the holy Sacrifice was daily offered. The Bishop, however, wished the children of the boarding school to attend Mass on Sundays at the parish church, and several months passed before he allowed the Blessed Sacrament to be reserved. Mère Julie, in her humility, attributed the delay to her sins. At last the favour was granted, and from September 21, 1809, our Lord has had a permanent dwelling in the midst of His spouses.

One of the chief means for maintaining or renewing that spirit of which Mère Julie has said so much, and which was to emanate from the Mother-House, is the annual retreat. In the month of September, 1810, we find Père Thomas giving

the Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Sisters of Notre-Dame gathered together from all parts at Namur. The Foundress, as on a former occasion, sacrificed for the sake of her children the pleasure of following the general retreat, and with two or three Flemish Sisters, who did not understand French, to help her, undertook the office of Martha, that they might be free to sit with Mary at the Master's feet. When the exercises were over, the Father took the Sisters through a course of "Pedagogy," that science of which we hear so much nowadays, but which is only solid when it is built upon foundations of faith. In the archives of the Institute are preserved some precious notes of the principal discourses made by the zealous Jesuit to whom it owes so much. Speaking to the Sisters of the necessity of maintaining the primitive fervour, Père Thomas lays down the principle that a society is preserved and increased by virtue of the same causes which gave it birth. And he drew a moving picture of the fervour of the Mothers and elder Sisters in the first days of the Congregation, in the little house of the Rue Neuve at Amiens—of the humility, the mortification, the spirit of prayer, which had drawn down such blessings from on high. He insisted strongly on the obligation which lies upon a Sister of Notre-Dame of perfecting herself in her studies so as

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to render herself capable of discharging fitly her duties as teacher. He lifted their thoughts to the august nature of their mission.

“To train up children, to form them to knowledge, and, better still, to piety and virtue, to cultivate souls, to fashion hearts—what is there nobler, what is there more divine? In whatever place obedience may fix you, my dear Sisters, you can say: I am doing the same work as Jesus Christ and the Apostles. To help you to attain that sublime end—the Christian education of youth—more surely, God wills you to enjoy a certain consideration, a reputation for learning and virtue without which people would not entrust their children to you. Do not imagine for a moment that this is meant to make any one of you personally conspicuous. Oh! if that were what you aimed at, I would ask the Lord rather to visit you with His thunderbolts. But this shall never be. My God had in His mercy far other designs in instituting this new Order destined to procure a solid Christian education for persons of your sex, who in their turn will afterwards gain others to religion and piety. . . . Jesus is, and always will be, the Resurrection and the Life; it was from His Heart that your Society came forth for the conversion and sanctification of many. Each one of you should say to herself: My vocation is

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entirely heavenly and divine. Ah, what need of a whole retreat? One word sums up all for me—I am called to save the souls which Jesus Christ has bought with His Blood. That thought is enough to make me sacrifice myself wholly, incessantly to this divine work."

The zeal of the ardent religious was contagious; it thrilled through his audience and inspired the most generous resolutions. For several years in succession he renewed his ministrations, always producing marked fruits of sanctification. We shall not be surprised that in the Community there reigned a wonderful fervour, with the joy and peace that follow in its train. The perfume of these early days breathes in the testimonies given during the Process of Beatification by the old Sisters—the *Contemporaines*. "What I cannot give you an idea of without being moved again to tears," says one of these, "is the intense union which reigned between the Mothers and the Sisters; what veneration, what love, what trust, what humble submission! . . . and amongst ourselves charity was so great that when once, while we were busy washing up the dishes, a Sister happened to speak to another with a little sharpness, we all began to cry, and the fault was immediately repaired. Our poverty was great, and we wanted for many things; well! there was



MOTHER-HOUSE, NAMUR: THE GROTTO WALK

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a holy strife among us who should deprive herself, for the sake of the others, of the little that she had."*

Félicité Chary, the postulant who had come to Namur with Mère St-Joseph and who had been a resident pupil in the Convent at Amiens, fell into a decline and was obliged to return home. Lying on her death-bed, she had ever upon her lips the praise of those who had brought her up, and to live with whom "seemed," as she said, "like living in paradise."

Around the Foundress gathered many holy and able religious. First and foremost among these, we need hardly say, was Mère St-Joseph, whom Julie had at once named her Assistant and the Superior of the house. Humble and submissive as the last and least of the novices, she never, when Julie was in the convent, gave an order in her own name; she would say, "Ma Mère wishes you to do this," "Ma Mère wants so-and-so." Whenever her office left her any leisure, she took her share in the common manual work which she looked upon as one of the means of perfection for the Institute, washing, ironing, peeling potatoes with the rest. At the same time she was very solicitous for the advancement of the Sisters in their studies, and especially in the supremest among them, Christian Doctrine. She constituted

* *Souvenirs* of Sœur Reine.

herself, therefore, their teacher, guiding their reading, correcting their exercises, and herself giving them lessons in arithmetic and grammar, in history, geography and needlework. Often Julie herself would visit the class at their work. "She would look at our copy-books," says one of the scholars of those days, "would encourage us and would enkindle our zeal for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. She used to put us on our guard against the danger of over-attachment to study and of sacrificing to its pursuit one's exercises of piety. 'You must do all that depends on you,' she said, 'in order to acquire the knowledge necessary for giving solid instruction to your pupils. I do not mean that you must labour to become learned women, nor that I want to make the aim of our Institute consist in knowledge. No, but you must acquire it in order to use it as a bait with which to take souls for God!'"

"One day," says the same narrator, "Mère Julie came in while we were practising writing. 'Come,' said our Mother, 'let us try and cultivate several things at a time. You shall write essays on the evening instructions, then correct them and copy them out fair in your writing-books; so you will at one and the same time form your mind, nourish your soul, and improve in composition and hand-writing.'" Thus were put to-



THE NOVICIATE AT THE MOTHER-HOUSE, NAMUR

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gether the so-called "Themes," of which the precious collection is still preserved in the Mother-House.

Despite these marks of interest in her children's studies, however, Mère Julie would from time to time test the virtue of teacher and scholars by bringing the class to a sudden and unexpected close. The Assistant's call-bell would ring in the midst of some interesting lesson, and when she hastened to answer it there would stand Mère Julie, who accosted her with: "Quick, daughter, bring all the Sisters! they must go to the garden and take the caterpillars off the vegetables." Then, perhaps, Mère St-Joseph, somewhat disconcerted, would venture a representation: "But, ma Mère, we are just in the middle of such and such an explanation." "It does not signify, my daughter, the caterpillars are eating up our cabbages, and the Sisters must come and kill them." And Mère St-Joseph, without another word, would call her pupils away from their books, and all would troop gaily off to the garden after Mère Julie.

The class-mistresses thus formed by the Foundress did the work of God nobly around her. There was Sister Madeleine Goemaere, a native of Warneton in Flanders, who spoke French and Flemish equally well, and who was so zealous and so successful in instructing children and preparing them for the Sacraments, that the priests

of all the parishes were accustomed to send her sinners to convert and instruct after school hours; men or women, labourers, beggars, soldiers, she welcomed them all. Canon Théodore de Montpellier, the future Bishop of Liège, used to call her his "third curate." It was this Sister Madeleine who, when later on she was in charge of the Poor School at Gembloux, once complained to the Blessed Servant of God that her classroom was full of vermin. "That is nothing, my daughter," said Mère Julie; "scatter a little sand over the floor and all will disappear." She obeyed, and nothing of the kind was ever seen again.

Many years after the time of which we are writing, in 1829, William I, King of the Netherlands, visited her class. The good Sister was not in the least disconcerted by the presence of royalty, and at His Majesty's request continued with perfect composure the lesson she had begun.

In the Day School laboured Sister St-Nicolas, whose lips moved in perpetual prayer, and whose horror for sin was so great that the thought that, as long as she was on earth, she might still offend God made her continually long for death. Mère Julie well knew the virtue of this religious, and treated her accordingly. Once, for a slight expression of impatience to another Sister, she enjoined on her as a penance to keep silence for an entire year. It was cheerfully and punctually accom-

plished, and great was the edification of the Community to see the holy Sister day after day sitting in their midst at recreation time without once opening her lips.

Finally, at the head of the *Pensionnat* was Sister Eulalie, whose acquaintance we have already made, forming her pupils not only to solid piety and virtue, but to a certain exquisite politeness and a simple distinction of manner and bearing which are the ornament of Christian womanhood. As the years went on, she was tried by severe interior sufferings, and once, when, as sacristan at Ghent she was busy in the sanctuary, in the anguish of her soul she cried out half aloud: "My God, my God, where art Thou then? Come to my help, I can bear it no longer." Clear and distinct a voice came from the tabernacle, "I am here," and the weight was lifted from her spirit for ever.

Some of Sister Eulalie's *pensionnaires*, called in the white winter of their age to give testimony to the virtues of Blessed Julie, have drawn charming pictures of those early years in the Convent of the Rue des Fossés, and of her whom their little hearts had already canonized.

"I was amongst the first pupils in 1809," writes Mlle. Henriette Fallon. "Mère Julie was not only a saint, but a queen among saints. How I loved and revered her! I used to love to watch

her at prayer in church, she seemed lost in God; the sight of her profound adoration made one pray. When she walked back from the Communion rails, her face was radiant, quite fresh and rose-coloured; the beauty of her soul seemed poured out on all her exterior. When she talked to us, her words were *soaked with God*; she used to fill us with a great horror of sin and a great love for the good God who, she always told us, was so good, so good! . . . In the intervals of her many journeys Mère Julie was everywhere, seeing to everything; she used to appear in the classes when she was least expected, but how joyously we greeted her! for we felt better and nearer to the good God when we had seen and heard the holy Mother, and we were so happy as we gathered round her. Every one esteemed her, every one loved her; one could not meet that smiling face, with kindness written on its every feature, without feeling deeply impressed. She had an affectionate word for all, but when she spoke to us of her good God, oh! then she captivated us, and we could have listened to her for hours together. Virtue seemed so lovable in her, and I think there are very few saints like her. When she died I wept for her as a Saint, and now, at the age of eighty-four, I can truly say that my sweetest memories go back to good Mère Julie."



NOTRE DAME, NAZMUR: THE CHURCH AND BOARDING SCHOOL

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We make no apology for quoting, almost in full, one more set of these naïve, and, it may be, somewhat rambling reminiscences, for, better than any more studied analysis, they make Julie live again before us. These are from the pen of Mme. Bosseret, *née* Anne Josèphe Quertainmont.

“I was an orphan, and was put to school at Namur when yet very young. I shall never forget Mère Julie’s welcome. When my guardian confided me to her she kissed me saying: ‘Poor little thing, you have no mother. Well! I promise you that you shall have here as many mothers as there are Sisters; and you will try to be a good child of the good God and the blessed Virgin who has a special love for orphans.’ Then she took me to see my little companions. Next day she sent for me again, and from time to time she would say something kind to me or give me some little dainty. Mère Julie was always so sweet, so smiling, so kind. She used always to say to us: ‘You must do well all that you do because it is to please the good God. Be good, my children, so that the good God may always look on you with pleasure.’

“She often made us sing hymns, which I still know by heart, but when she herself sang, what animation!—she threw her very heart into it.

“When she spoke to us of Holy Communion

she set us on fire. She had such a great spirit of faith, such a boundless confidence in God. I still seem to hear her say in that voice of hers which rang so clear, so pure, so firm: 'My children, there is but one single sin which opens hell—dis-trust of God; as for all other sins the good God forgives them and washes them away by the merits of Jesus Christ; but Our Lord cannot enter into a heart which turns away from Him. He is so good, the good God, and we hurt Him when we do not trust Him.' And the good Mother wept. . . . She used to warn us against human respect. 'Dare always to confess and to show yourselves Christians, my children, so that the good God may not be ashamed of you at the last judgement. Have a great heart, be very devoted, and if you live in the midst of the world despise the vanity of the world.' How many times did she not repeat to us: 'My children, you are what you are before God, nothing more, but nothing less, and you are great if your soul is pure and your heart right.' Again, I hear her saying: 'You are going to love the good God very much, are you not, my children? Come! who is going to love Him most?' And one day a mischievous little girl answered the question: 'I, ma Mère, because I mean to love Him as much as you do, and as I love you very much, ma Mère, I ask the good God to make my heart like yours.' The good Mother

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smiled and said: 'Well! my little Jeanne, to prove to me that you really wish to love the good God, do not turn your head round any more when you are in chapel.' The child dropped her eyes and at recreation she narrated to Sister Eulalie what 'ma Mère' had said to her. 'But I promised ma Mère nothing,' she added, 'because when I do not feel inclined to pray I look at her, and, as she prays so well, then I want to pray like her.' Sister Eulalie could not forbid so legitimate a distraction. . . .

"One day when our dear Mère Julie had come back from a journey to St-Hubert was a memorable one to us, for she gave each of us a rosary. I still keep mine as a precious souvenir, and I shall bequeath it to my grandchildren.

"From time to time Mère Julie would pay a surprise visit to us in the refectory to see if we were listening attentively to the reading. Sometimes she would put questions to us on what had been read: it was generally the life of a saint, and 'ma Mère,' who was a saint herself, would thereupon improvise a little sermon, which did us more good than all our readings. Oh! how it lifted us up to see her, to hear her! She would urge us to invoke the Blessed Virgin very often with the ejaculation: 'Mary, Mother of Grace, pray for us,' because, she said, all consists in being faithful to grace.

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“When I was fifteen I said to Mère Julie, who had just given me a little picture for my birthday: ‘I should like to be a religious, ma Mère, and to be your child.’ She answered me gently: ‘Well! your vocation is not to religious life; the good God wants you to do good in the world, and you will be happy there.’ I was just a little sad at that, and she said to me: ‘We must always be pleased with the will of the good God.’

“Mère Julie often spoke to us of death; she used to say that on Saturday we should always think of death and prepare ourselves for it. She made us look forward to death as to a feast, because we then go to God; and when she said: ‘We shall see the good God!’ her face became radiant. She used to tell us, too, that we ought to be apostles in the world, give ourselves to good works, set a good example, and above all when we grew older help the dying, and get them the last sacraments.

“Mère Julie was right; I married, and I have been happy. All my children and grandchildren are good Christians. I have retired here* as a paying boarder because I wished to follow Mère Julie’s advice and prepare myself for a good death; and then, when I first came, the Sisters of Notre-Dame were here, and I felt so glad to end my

* To the Hospice of Harscamp, of which the Sisters of Notre-Dame were temporarily in charge till it was taken over by the Sisters of Charity.

life among them. The good God asked me to make the sacrifice of that desire; I tried to say, like my Mère Julie, 'Blessed be the Name of the Lord!' and I hope to die saying, 'How good is the good God!'"

In Namur itself Mgr. de Pisani's prediction was speedily realized, and the townsfolk, who had at first insulted "these nuns sent out of France and who have come to eat our bread," were completely won by the charity of the Servant of God and have ever since held her memory in benediction.

In less than two years the character of the children of the masses was entirely changed; they had become gentle, polite, and their very speech had lost its native roughness. Every one in the town held Julie in high esteem, but the common people simply idolized her; "She is amongst us just what our Lord would have been," they said. Two stories have come down to us. One day, as she was returning from Mass at the parish church, she met a poor woman bathed in tears. Julie went up to comfort her, and learnt that the husband, an honest shoemaker named Massart, was out of work, and the family starving; but the woman could not bring herself to beg. "Do not weep, my dear," said Julie, full of sympathy; "the good God is so good that He is going to help you at once. Come with me to the convent of the Dames Fran-

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çaises,"—the name by which the Sisters of Notre-Dame were at first known—"the Sisters' shoes are quite worn out, for they have just come a long journey. You shall take them to your husband to mend, until we can afford to order new ones of him, and I will pay you in advance."

The shoes—or the hands which gave them—brought a blessing with them. Customers flocked in again, Massart's fortune was made, and some years later he was able to open a large shop and to send one of his sons to the Seminary. The grateful family never forgot their benefactress, and reverently kept a book on Devotion to the Sacred Heart, which she had given to the poor wife in her first grief.

The second incident shall be given in the words of the poor woman herself who was its subject. "I was very unhappy; my husband made my life unbearable, and we often wanted bread. One day my little boy of six met Mère Julie who stroked his cheeks and asked him if he loved the good God. 'I am hungry' was the child's only answer. At once Mère Julie took him by the hand and led him to the Convent, where she gave him a large slice of bread and butter and an apple and asked him to promise to pray to the good God. The child looked astonished—no one ever spoke to him of the good God at home—and by that look of his the good Mother understood all. She said to him:

‘Come back to-morrow with your mother; tell her Mère Julie wants to speak to her.’ So next day I went with my little Louis, and Mère Julie welcomed us so kindly that I told her all my troubles. She comforted me, bade me have recourse to God and made me promise to say very often, ‘How good the good God is!’ ‘But that is not in my heart,’ I said. ‘Say it nevertheless, and it will penetrate into your heart.’ She made me come back again and gave me the means of relieving our misery. A little later she took me to Sister Madeleine, who instructed me in the truths of religion and prepared me to make a general confession. On the day when I made my communion Mère Julie came to the church to be present at it, and then sent up a little feast to us. My husband was quite astonished to see me so changed; I no longer used bad language to him. Mère Julie’s zeal extended to all the family; she sent for my husband, talked to him and won the cause of the good God so well that when he came home he said to me: ‘Wife, that Mère Julie is like the good God; she gets hold of your heart without your knowing how.’ He used to go twice a week to Sister Madeleine, and after three weeks he went with me to the sacraments. We were so happy! Afterwards we paid a visit to dear Mère Julie who spoke to us of the good God, and especially of confidence in God. My husband said

to her: 'How good you are, Madame.' 'Oh!' said Mère Julie, 'if you think me good, me who have done so little for you, how good you ought to think the good God, who created you, redeemed you and has prepared His beautiful heaven as the reward of your fidelity,' and her face became quite lit up. She made us promise to say in all our troubles as well as in all our joys: 'How good the good God is! Blessed be His holy name!' I did so, and so did my husband, but at the good Mother's death we were so sad, so lost, because our angel guardian had gone from us, that we found it very difficult to say, 'How good is the good God! Blessed be His holy name!'"

The little girls who crowded the poor school were the best-beloved portion of Julie's flock, and in their old age many of them loved to tell what joy there was when the Servant of God went round the classes with the beaming smile which always won children, questioning them on the Catechism, and giving her crucifix to kiss to those who answered well. But her visits were chiefly welcome at those Sunday meetings which, at Namur as at Amiens, gathered together the elder girls, and where they received not only religious instruction, but the prudent counsels and maternal guidance which their age and position so often called for. Mère Julie's watchfulness over these young girls went so far as to see that



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each one was under the care of a trustworthy companion when they returned home in the evening.

To the good Bishop of Namur the Convent in the Rue des Fossés was a Bethany where he sought rest and refreshment in the midst of his heavy pastoral labours. He did not spare his praises of the Foundresses: "My dear children," he said to the Sisters on January 1, 1810, replying to their good wishes for the New Year, "your two Mothers are the models of what you ought to be; so long as you keep your eyes fixed on them, Our Lord will give you the grace of perfect fidelity to your vocation."

Seeing all the good done at Notre-Dame, the clergy, with the best intentions, sent several young persons to the Convent as postulants. Oftentimes Julie saw well at first sight that they were unsuited to the Institute, but out of deference to the priests would admit them on trial, with the result she had foreseen. Some of these, on leaving, justified their own defection by inveighing against the Order, and at last malicious persons went so far as to say that the House of the Dames Françaises was a pigeon-cote, into which people only went to fly away again. The complaints were carried to the Bishop and his intervention sought. "Ah!" replied Mgr. Pisani, "let the good Mother go her own way. She will have great souls,

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chosen souls, magnanimous souls; I have more confidence in the good she will do with a dozen religious selected and formed by herself than in the devotedness of fifty who had been imposed upon her and whom she could not handle as she liked. There is nothing personal in Mère Julie: all is for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. I know well that the life of her daughters is hard and full of sacrifice, but Mère Julie has such an art of persuading souls to this love of her *good God* and this desire of imitating our Lord Jesus Christ that it is a consolation to see these generous religious embrace the cross and all manner of privations as others embrace pleasures. I am personally acquainted with all of them and I know that not one is unhappy—one and all live a life of gratitude, of love, of zeal. Let Mère Julie alone, and do not meddle with her ways of acting; you would only spoil the work of God."

The full-length portrait of Mgr. Pisani, his own gift, hangs in the large parlour of the Mother House, and is to the Institute a perpetual memorial of one in whom at the hour of need it found a defender, a protector and a father.



MGR DE BROGLIE
Bishop of Ghent

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CHAPTER XIV

Notre-Dame at Ghent

IN the year 1807 Mgr. Fallot de Beaumont had been transferred from the see of Ghent to that of Piacenza. His place was filled by the Bishop of Acqui in Piedmont, Maurice-Jean de Broglie, son of Victor Francis, Duke of Broglie and Marshal of France, whose glorious military enterprises during the Seven Years' War were rewarded by Francis I. with the principedom of the Holy Roman Empire for himself and his posterity. The Prince-Bishop's career had already been a chequered one, and, as we shall see, he was reserved for fresh and greater sorrows. His younger brother had lost his life by the guillotine, and he himself had been forced to emigrate with his father to Germany. On his return to France Napoleon created him his chaplain, a post he filled till his consecration to the see of Acqui. His personality was in many ways a remarkable one. Deep learning and an austere private life were combined with keen sensibilities and great warmth of affection; while the weakness of his physical constitution was more than compensated for by

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a hereditary vigour of character, which his staunch devotion to the Church and her interests was to glorify into an apostolic intrepidity. Shortly after the emigration to Namur, the affairs of the St-Nicolas convent, whose insanitary condition the authorities had taken no steps to remedy, again took the Foundress to Ghent. She desired to lay the matter before Mgr. de Broglie, hoping that his influence might obtain some relief for the suffering community; she was also not a little anxious to learn in what light he regarded the departure from Amiens. A letter dated April 25, 1809, gives an account of this second interview:

“ I reached Brussels at six in the evening. God, always infinitely good, allowed me to pass a quiet night in the *diligence*. Arriving in Ghent at half-past five in the morning, I went straight to the Church of St-Bavon to seek my good God, and I renewed my act of abandonment for all which it should please His Divine goodness to send me, or that I might have to suffer during this journey. I did not know where the Bishop was; I did not yet want to know; I only wanted to throw myself into the bosom of my God. This He gave me grace to do. As soon as I had received my Lord, I set out in search of good Father Bruson. He told me that Mgr. de Broglie was in Ghent, but was leaving for St-Nicolas on the

next day, and he offered to conduct me himself to the Bishop's house. His Lordship had gone out for the parochial Mass, and I waited for him in the chapel, alone with my God, putting everything into His hands."

The audience proved entirely satisfactory. "Tell me all your troubles, Mère Julie," was the Bishop's cordial greeting; "come, tell me everything." And so, as she playfully says, she had made her general confession to him, only, of course, she had passed over many things for the sake of charity. Still, he had quite understood. He had said to her: "Those who hear but one bell hear but one sound. How could they dream of making you give up all the property of your companion? For my part, I should be quite opposed to such a measure." And he had added: "The more I see good people harassed, the more I try to help them." In the course of conversation he had asked her how she stood with the Bishop of Tournay, and Julie had made him laugh heartily by her answer: "My Lord, I have been well blackened to the Bishop of Tournay, and I do not know whether I am white again." "Yes, indeed, they manage to do that well in this part of the world." One remark of the Prince had made her specially happy; he had said to her spontaneously and with great emphasis: "You

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are not intended to be shut up in one diocese ; no, Mère Julie, *your vocation is to go all over the world.*" Mère St-Joseph would rejoice with her at seeing how God thus arranged that their cause should be taken in hand by the very person whom they had been led to believe most ill-disposed towards them. As to the question of St-Nicolas, the Bishop had arranged to meet her there on the morrow and try to settle the business on the spot.

The prelate was as good as his word. He convinced himself by personal inspection that *Berkenboom* was quite uninhabitable ; he did his best to induce the civil authorities to remedy matters, and even carried his benevolence so far as to visit a house which he thought might suit the Sisters. But all his efforts failed ; the authorities refused to bestir themselves ; the people were prejudiced against religious who were Frenchwomen. " Shake the dust from off your feet," said the Bishop to the Foundress as he parted from her. " If St-Nicolas does not treat you better, come and settle yourselves in Ghent ; I must keep you in my diocese." The affair pressed, for the lease of the house then occupied by the Sisters expired on May 8, and if they remained another day they would have to pay the rent for an entire quarter. Mère Julie's search for a house proved as unsuccessful as her

negotiations with the burgomaster; and when, on her return to Ghent, she reported matters to Mgr. de Broglie, he sent her straight back to the inhospitable little town with orders to bring away the community without delay; he himself promised to find a lodging for them in Ghent. Mère Julie's activity made short work of the *déménagement*. In two days the boarders had been returned to their families, the day school broken up, and the household articles belonging to the Sisters packed up, together with a large provision of bread which Mère Julie caused them to bake before setting out, so that they might not have to burden any one in Ghent with supplying to them the necessaries of life. A crowd conducted the coach out of the town, hurling in Flemish a discordant volley of insults and abuse at the religious who for two years had done their utmost to serve them. Mère Julie herself arranged another humiliation for her daughters. On reaching Ghent she bade the little band deposit their bundles and packages in the courtyard of the *Hôtel du Cerf*, the coach terminus, and sit down upon them to await her return. She herself went with Sister Catherine Daullée to the Bishop's house to make inquiries about the proffered lodging for the Sisters. Sister Marie Steenhaut, who tells the story, must have recalled her old Courtrai experiences as a crowd of little urchins

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trooped round to stare and laugh at the poor nuns, while the passers-by offered various conjectures as to who the new-comers were. "It was," she adds, "an exercise of patience and humility from which we may hope to have gained some merit, since the absence of our Mother was prolonged for several hours." Julie, on her side, had met with some mortification. The Bishop, who had forgotten about the expiration of the lease, and who, in any case, had not been prepared for so prompt an evacuation, was not quite pleased to have the Sisters on his hands. However, he sent Julie with his secretary, M. Van Schouwenberghe, to the Sisters of Charity with a request that they would give a temporary shelter to the Sisters of Notre-Dame. This met with a cordial assent; two rooms and a small kitchen were at once placed at the disposal of the little community. The Sisters now understood why their Mother had kept singing during their journey: "Oh! what a pleasant dwelling is a dwelling without a house."*

The furniture of the convent at St-Nicolas was the property of the town, so that they now found themselves without the most absolute necessities; and Julie, happy both for herself and her daughters to suffer some of the effects of evangelical poverty, had hastened to assure their

* "Oh! l'agréable demeure que la demeure sans maison!"

kind hosts that they had everything they wanted. No privations, however, damped the gaiety of the little party, and their trust in God was often wonderfully and unexpectedly answered. "There are four beds and we are seven," writes the Foundress. The missing ones were improvised by spreading their clothes on the floor, some faggots found in a corner serving as pillows. The preparations for supper were equally simple—it consisted of the dry bread they had brought with them. The worst difficulty was that they had no light. Suddenly a knock comes at the door, and the director of the hospice appears with his servant, bringing them a lamp and a jug of beer. Later on the famous bread became so mouldy that it was converted into a kind of paste full of green patches; "but," says Sister Marie Steenhaut, "Mère Julie used to bless it, and it never did us any harm." "To-day I set up our kitchen with fourteen pence," writes the Foundress herself; "that was not dear. We have bread, salt and butter, and we are buying potatoes. We are the happiest women in all the city of Ghent. Of the six *louis* which I brought away with me I still have five. I believe God, like a good Father, must multiply them in my purse."

One day, as the Sisters were regretting that their Mother had nothing to drink but the cold water which was so bad for her, a hamper of wine

was left at the door—a present from M. Lemaire-Kinet, a good merchant of the town. The Sister who took it in asked Mère Julie for a few pence to give to the bearer. “We are too poor, my daughter,” answered the Servant of God. “Say to him: ‘Ma Mère says *Deo gratias*.’” The Sister obeyed, and the good Fleming, who did not understand a word of French, let alone Latin, was much puzzled, but we do not doubt that Julie’s *Deo gratias* will have brought him many a blessing. A few days later another benefactor appeared in the person of M. Van Schouwenberghe, brother to the Bishop’s secretary. From that time these two kind friends relieved the most pressing needs of the community, while the Vicar-General, who had constituted himself its confessor till a suitable priest should be appointed to that post, spared himself no pains to find them a house in a quarter where they could be of most use to the poor. While waiting, the Sisters employed themselves, some in making lace as a means of livelihood, some in perfecting themselves in the subjects they would be required to teach. In the midst of these crowded and harassing weeks, Julie never forgets the rest of her family. A whole set of letters from St-Nicolas and Ghent went to keep Mère St-Joseph constantly informed of her doings, interspersed with many a gentle and strong counsel or encourage-

ment to this or that Sister or to the community at large.

At one time she reminds them to love "the sweet and loving Heart of our dear, good Jesus, and always also His blessed Cross—yes, even at Eastertide, it is good at all times. *Benedicam Dominum omni tempore!*"*

At another she prays that "the good God may be the soul of their souls, that all may labour to become holy, by purity of intention. Ah! dear daughters, let us make haste, let us make great haste, to lay a solid foundation of virtue in the Mother House." She hopes that the good God is pleased with them all, nothing else matters. Above all, she would have them knit ever closer the precious bonds of their union in Our Lord; that blessed union in our dear Lord Jesus is her constant and sole prayer for them, for through it all other graces shall fall upon them in abundance. The devil cannot enter into a house of which the holy charity of Jesus Christ is the soul.

She is so sorry to have been absent on the First Communion Day of the four dear little *pensionnaires*; she sends them her love, and hopes they pray for her as she is always doing for them.†

On May 9, the day following the arrival of the St-Nicolas community at Ghent, after having, as

* From St-Nicolas, April 27, 1809.

† From Ghent, May 5, 1809.

she says, been tossed like a ball during the whole week backwards and forwards from Ghent to St-Nicolas and St-Nicolas to Ghent, she finds time for a long letter to Namur. She begs Mère St-Joseph to see to it that the young Sisters are not too noisy at recreation—that scatters recollection and does much harm to souls. Mère St-Joseph herself is not to worry over her conduct to the Sisters; everything is well. She is to go on simply, in total forgetfulness of self, and then the spirit of the good God will take the place of her own. Very often it is a mere trifle that would give God a perfectly free hand in us; so we must have a very great confidence in the good God, and great contempt for ourselves, and forgetfulness of the wretched “me.” “Say a thousand kind things to my dear daughters. How I long to find them well on the way in the life of faith, a life wholly of God, wholly in God. If they only knew what a *fund of God* there must be in our holy vocation.” There is a tender message of encouragement to Sister Eulalie “for the efforts she is making, which please me so much,” and a thoughtful injunction to send on a little budget of news to good Sister Anastasie. Julie herself will not have time to do so, as tomorrow she will be obliged “to beat the town for a house.”

Back again at Namur for a little space, the Servant of God opposed M. Minsart’s suggestion

that the day school should be given up lest it should diminish the number of resident pupils. The Blessed Mother's views were wider and higher.

"They say we shall have fewer boarders? Well, I think just the contrary. All these notions are our own views merely; let us set them all aside, and only adopt those of faith, living faith, 'the faith of God.' How consoling to teach the little girls of the town to love the good God! And this being our only desire, are we going to have any fears of the consequences? Ah! my dear daughter, I know well that you judge all things in God. Receive all whom He sends you, without saying anything to anybody; we must have perfect liberty in God to do our work."

Early in June she is once more in Ghent pursuing her search for a house. None could be found, and she was beginning to wonder whether it was after all God's will that her daughters should establish themselves in Ghent, when Père Bruson, formerly Rector of the College of the Fathers of the Faith at Amiens, and now living with the Abbé Malingié, Curé of St-Pierre, made her known to the latter. This zealous priest was most eager to benefit the poor of his parish by any means in his power, and at once introduced her to the Baron Coppens, who offered

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the Sisters the temporary use of a large house and garden belonging to him. Thither, then, Julie at once transported her little colony, and wrote to tell the good news to Mère St-Joseph. "After this house, another, if God so please! confidence, therefore, and love, and total abandonment into the hands of the good God. How good it is to trust Him alone!"* Next day her heart pours itself out in one of those pages, half letter, half talk, with which her correspondence has already familiarised us:

"My dear Daughter, tell me something about our good Sisters. Has not the divine and adorable Heart of my dear Jesus yet entirely consumed their own? Shall I still find hearts which are not wholly filled with the desire of living only by the life of their Jesus within them? Oh, beautiful and divine life! Oh, foretaste of the happiness of heaven! Ma Mère, ma Mère, indeed we wish it—we all wish it with all our hearts; what must we do?—tell us, ma Mère, tell us. Ah! dear daughters, what must you do? Love your dear Jesus, live only for Him by the greatest possible simplicity of heart; have a boundless charity for each other, and so great a compassion for the little sufferings or failings of your sisters, that you bear one another's. In a word, very great purity of intention."

* June 10, 1809.

The Servant of God wished her children to prepare themselves for their apostolate in Ghent by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. They were given to them by Père Bruson, who, as Sister Marie says, filled their souls with his own zeal and fervour. Julie herself entered into retreat with the others, but on the very next day, June 17, was called from her solitude by Mgr. de Broglie, who had formed the project of founding and endowing an establishment of Sisters of Notre-Dame at St-Gilles, an important country town in the Waes district.

“My dear Friend—Always something new! I have just come from the Bishop, who could not be kinder than he is. I told him I was going back to Namur with some of the Sisters. He answered that he forbade me to remove a single one; he has in view a foundation in the country. On Monday he is giving confirmation there, and on Wednesday he will send for me to see if this foundation would suit us. I cannot write all he said; amongst other things: ‘I will not do like the Bishop of Amiens, I will not send you out of my diocese. I mean to keep you—yes, to keep you.’ ‘My Lord, we are at your command.’ ‘I am not afraid of having plenty of you in my diocese.’ I cannot tell you all the kindness he shows us. . . . I can see his good heart; no one could be kinder, though at the same time he is firm.

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"The Curé of St-Pierre, in whose parish we are, is bent on having the Sisters permanently established there. The Bishop, too, wishes it. May the good God direct everything to His greater glory! Write me word what you think of both these projects. . . . I am dragged about on all sides. We must let the good God do with us as He pleases. He is so good that He can will nothing but what is very good, both for our welfare and His own greater glory. It is late; I cannot write more now. Patience! when we see each other again, we shall have all kinds of things to talk of in God and for God."

In October, 1809, after some months filled with journeys both in France and Belgium, Julie is back again in Ghent, for the loan of the Coppens mansion expired on All Saints' day. The letter just quoted speaks in sober terms of the foundation in the parish of St-Pierre. The good Curé, bent on keeping the Sisters and on making their school an exclusively personal foundation, now came forward with the generous offer both to take a house for them at his own expense and to make himself responsible for their support. Yet, writes Sister Marie, "led by the spirit of God, our Mother said naïvely to her daughters: 'The good God is not soliciting me, is not pressing me. I do not yet see clearly.'" She had, nevertheless, accepted the

proposal as the only solution when obstacles arose on the part of the Government. The imperial decree permitted new foundations only on condition of obtaining a fresh authorization each time. So when the Abbé Malingié applied for permission to open a school in his parish, the Prefect of the Department of the Scheldt informed him the Ministry had just forbidden the Sisters of Notre-Dame, by name, to make any new foundations for the present. There was nothing to be done but to submit, and both the projected establishments were abandoned.* This was the first difficulty the Institute had experienced at the hands of the civil authorities. It caused considerable surprise, and the *Memoirs* tell us that both Mgr. de Broglie and Mère Julie suspected in this rigorous measure "the influence of a person strongly opposed to the Foundress."†

But the Curé of St-Pierre was not to be baffled, and proposed, as a compromise, that the Sisters should open a lace work-room. By this means the poor girls of the parish would get occupation and be taught their religion without the name of going to school. The Bishop, however, feared that the Prefect would regard the plan as an indirect contravention of his orders; but ultimately, the local authorities themselves intimated to Julie that they

* The house at St-Gilles was founded in 1866.

† *Memoirs*, vol. II, page 197.

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meant to shut their eyes, and he withdrew his opposition. Still, this parochial establishment did not wholly commend itself to Mère Julie; it seemed to her to lack the elements of stability. Possibly, too, she foresaw a danger of over-interference in the management of the school and convent, and some restriction on her own free hand in placing or removing subjects as the good of the Institute required. But her obligations to the good priest were too great to let her precipitate matters; she did as she always did, left things to the providence of God.

While these deliberations were pending, she was told of an ancient abbey in another part of the town, which had been suppressed by the Revolution. It had been a vast monastery of the Cistercian Order, tracing its origin back to the thirteenth century. Established at first in the Waes district at a place called Oudenbosch, or "The Old Wood," and also, as the "Memoirs of the City of Ghent" inform us, *Locus Sanctæ Mariæ*, the Cistercian-esses took refuge in Ghent during the troubled times of the sixteenth century. Here they erected a new abbey, which still bears the name they gave it of *Nouveau-Bois*, though the Flemish equivalent has naturally, and not unfitly, been corrupted into "*Nonnen-bosch*," or the "Nuns' Wood." Other memories of the daughters of St. Bernard linger in the place. The church, raised in 1640, and sur-



THE CHURCH AT NOUVEAU-BOIS

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mounted a century later by its graceful tower, is substantially the same, and is adorned with several paintings by Roose,* which attract the admiration of connoisseurs. Many of these represent scenes from the life of the Saint of Clairvaux, while that which surmounts the High Altar, "The Sibyls in Adoration before the Infant Christ," formed the dowry of his only daughter on her entrance into religion at Nouveau-Bois. On either side of the altar are fine statues of St. Bernard and his sister, St. Humbeline. The present altar, of Carrara marble, replaced an older, and, as some think, a handsomer one, of which a bas-relief, also representing an episode in the Saint's life, is preserved in the sacristy. The superb cloisters of the Abbey stand as of old, and the portrait of the last Abbess still hangs on the convent walls.

During the French Revolution these daughters of St. Bernard contrived to save their house from utter destruction by selling it for a very moderate sum to a gentleman of Ghent, M. Pycke de Peteghem, on condition of being allowed to buy it back, if they were ever able to reconstitute their scattered community. At the period of which we write their re-establishment had become impossible. Of the former community only two very aged religious remained. The buildings were in

*Nicholas de Liemacker, known as Roose, was a pupil of Otto Venius, the master of Rubens. He died in 1645.

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the most neglected state. The church had been turned into a barn and a powder-magazine; later on an engineer had built a chimney and set up a forge, which greatly damaged the nave. "Our Mother's heart was touched to see the temple of the Lord thus degraded," writes Sister Marie (Steenhaut) in the *Annals of Nouveau-Bois*; "her zeal and her love were set on fire. She longed for the time when the praises of God should again be sung there, and she seemed to hear Him say: 'That day will come; do not lose heart.'" One part of the sacred edifice was given up to workmen, but a large wing was occupied by a schoolmaster, who seemed disposed to part with his lease in favour of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. The Curé of St-Pierre, meanwhile, in a great hurry to have his school opened by the Sisters, hired a house for them in the Rue des Femmes. The Foundress was absent at the time; when she returned, she accepted the accomplished fact, quitted the house of the Baron Coppens with many expressions of gratitude for his hospitality, and installed her daughters in their new premises on the feast of Our Lady's Presentation, November 21, 1809. Her heart bounded with joy at the sight of the good to be done amongst the poor of that district, and she writes exultingly to her friend at Namur of the one hundred and thirty-two children who at once poured into the school. There are as many poor in

the place as there are stones; she does not know how the good Sisters will be able to get through all the work they have before them. But the good God is very good! She herself has been trotting about all the morning buying this article or that for the modest *ménage* of the Rue des Femmes—a stove, a saucepan, a gridiron—all sorts. Mère Blin will wonder where the money comes from. Well, for one thing, she takes care to get cheap things, though sometimes she has to hunt a long time before finding them. And then, too, somehow or other, she cannot quite understand how, she always finds a few crowns in her pocket.

The children who were crowding into the classes of Notre-Dame were ignorant beyond all conception. "I find myself in the midst of a troop of wretched little creatures," writes the Superior; "their ignorance is lamentable, and that of their parents still worse. One of the mothers has been married thirty years and does not even know her prayers! How can the poor children be expected to know theirs?"

At the same time the hoped-for establishment at Nouveau-Bois was approaching its realization. On the very day that the Sisters took possession of the house in the parish of St-Pierre, Mère Julie opened negotiations with M. d'Hont, the schoolmaster mentioned above. Mgr. de Broglie quite agreed with the Foundress that the founda-

tion at St-Pierre was not likely to be a permanent one; the Abbey of Nouveau-Bois pleased him exceedingly, and he gave his cordial approbation to a speedy arrangement of terms. Julie accordingly went with M. Lemaire-Kinet to interview the Cistercianesses, and, as so often, paid the price of personal humiliation for an undertaking destined to be much blessed of God. When the two dignified old ladies beheld the Servant of God in her odd travelling costume, and with her simple and unpretentious approach, they could not believe this was the lessee of their antique and beautiful abbey. "What!" they exclaimed, "is that the person?" and one of them burst out laughing. M. Lemaire's word, however, soon re-assured them, and later on they conceived a deep esteem for Julie and showed much real kindness to her Sisters.

Thus arrangements were ultimately concluded to the satisfaction of all parties. The good Cistercianesses were genuinely pleased to have their beloved monastery once more occupied by religious; Mme. Pycke, to whose family the property now belonged, also rejoiced to see it restored to its original destination. This lady's son, who was preparing for the priesthood, held Mère Julie in high esteem. He was studying his theology under the Fathers of the Faith, and had learnt from them a good deal about her apostolic

labours in France and the sufferings she had endured. When to his great delight, he had made the acquaintance of the Servant of God, he hastened to ask her whether it were true that she had been miraculously cured after a novena to the Heart of Jesus. Julie could not deny the favour which she never made known unasked, and the young cleric, who had himself a very special devotion to the Sacred Heart, did all in his power to procure favourable terms for her from his mother. In after years the Abbé Pycke became honorary Vicar General of Ghent and secret chamberlain to Pope Gregory XVI.

The Foundress was now free to occupy the Abbey as soon as she pleased. She had, moreover, perfect liberty to give it up at the end of that year or any other year, and even to cancel her engagement altogether, if unforeseen circumstances should prevent the opening of the schools. But Mère Julie still hesitated to close with these offers, however advantageous, fearing to tempt Providence if she opened a second house in the city without being sure of the means of subsistence. Moreover, the reply of the Government to the application of the Sisters for legal recognition had been couched in sufficiently ambiguous terms, and new laws were threatening Christian schools and colleges. She returned to Namur and laid the matter before Mgr. Pisani, who, after due delibera-

tion, counselled delay, and Mère Julie at once communicated his decision to the Vicar-General of Ghent. But the ardent and intrepid bishop of that city thought otherwise. He had long learnt to reckon on God's help for the good works which he undertook for the benefit of his diocese, and he knew that the Sisters of Notre-Dame would gladly buy the privilege of helping souls at the cost of any privations. So he merely answered the Servant of God that the second foundation had to be made, and that he was expecting her immediately with some good Sisters to open the "Abbaye aux Bois." There was something in the Prince's bold and decisive manner of acting in harmony with Julie's own spirit. By nature she was neither slow nor timorous, and, say the *Memoirs*, had only waited so long in this instance for a higher authority to confirm her own interior conviction that this undertaking was willed by God. When once she had this confirmation she went boldly forward. "Whether we are helped or not," she said to Mère St-Joseph, "the thing must be done; we must not draw back even if we have to bear the whole cost. We must sail against wind and tide, and hope all the more from God as we receive less from men."

The desire of an episcopal colleague for whom he entertained so deep a regard at once drew the consent of Mgr. Pisani, her own immediate eccle-

siastical superior; and it only remained to choose the subjects for the new house. Two were taken from Namur, and others were to be supplied from the Convent of St-Pierre.

On February 12, 1810, the two Mothers went together to Ghent, and, while Mère Julie returned for a few days to take four postulants to the Mother-House, Mère St-Joseph conducted the little party to the Abbey, which thus became once again the "Nonnenbosch," the "Locus Sanctæ Mariæ."

During all these events M. de Sambucy had not remained inactive. No sooner were the Sisters of St-Nicolas transferred to Ghent than he took the initiative with Mgr. de Broglie by spontaneously writing to inform him that the whole fault in the Amiens difficulties had been on Julie's side, that the bishop had now happily destroyed the bad spirit she had fostered, and that the convents of Notre-Dame in his diocese were beginning to breathe freely; that they were now under his immediate jurisdiction and had no further connection with Julie, and that the "Mother-House at Amiens" was in a position to supply the different dioceses with Sisters of Notre-Dame "to replace those of Sister Julie." To this letter, and succeeding ones, the Bishop of Ghent had vouchsafed no reply, but at last an epistle of the Abbé to M. Le Surre brought down upon him the

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following severe document, still preserved in the archives of the Bishopric of Ghent:

“Ghent, June 25, 1809.

“You are very young, Sir, to set yourself up, as you do, to judge, or rather to censure the actions of a Bishop. Salvien, St. Jerome and St. Bernard were called in their time the Masters of the Bishops, but between them and you there is, you will allow, some difference. I had intended to give no answer to your letters about Sister Julie, but your last to M. Le Surre prevents me from following this plan. If you have a copy of that letter, read it over again, and I hope the expressions used with regard to myself will strike you as very unbecoming. I will not follow all your diffuse remarks; I will merely observe that—

“I. It is very strange you should give so much praise to the Bishop of Namur, who has done much more than the Bishop of Ghent, who has received at Namur the Superior and the religious ‘emigrants’ from Amiens, to use your own expression, who has occupied himself with their establishment in his city, and has spent whole hours in their convent after offering the holy sacrifice there; while the Bishop of Ghent has confined himself to allowing the removal into another town of a community which existed already at St-Nicolas under Mgr. de Beaumont. It is not I, but

they who have decided not to adhere to the changes made in their Constitutions at Amiens and at Montdidier, and who have remained attached to the same Superior and the same rule as before. Notwithstanding this, you dare to say: 'The excellent Bishop of Namur has treated of this with the Bishop of Amiens and myself in so frank and loyal a manner that we have only to congratulate ourselves on our correspondence with him.' This means the contrary for me, so that I am neither frank nor loyal. M. de Sambucy, I forgive you this language, but do not use it again, and remember to whom you write, and of whom you speak. Mgr. of Amiens has not written a line to me on the subject; if he had, I should have done myself the honour of writing to him in all frankness and loyalty, for I never act otherwise.

"2. You add: 'Mgr. of Namur approves, it is true, of a Superior-General, but this point is opposed to the wishes of the majority of the Bishops.' One would suppose that you were the confidant of the 'majority of the Bishops.' Mgr. of Amiens will not hear of a Superior-General. Mgr. of Namur wishes for one. And yet, if I am to believe you, these two are in perfect harmony. And Mgr. of Ghent, who has nothing to do with all this, who has done no more than keep in his diocese the nuns established by his predecessor,

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is the only person in the wrong. You wanted me to take part with the Bishop of Amiens against the Bishop of Namur. You are really very strange. Could I carry moderation further than to send you word I would conform to whatever my two colleagues decided? The Bishop of Amiens and you (for you consider yourselves one) do not want a Superior-General; now, if there is no Superior-General, there are only local Superiors. What in that case is to prevent Sister Julie from being Superior in the house that exists in the diocese of Ghent?

“3. If Mgr. of Namur is right in holding to a Superior-General, Sister Julie was that Superior before the changes introduced, under your direction, into this Association. And why may I not incline towards the opinion of one of my colleagues rather than that of another?

“4. The truth of all this is, that your changes have not had the success you hoped for, and yet you do not repent of having made them. As for me, I keep what Mgr. de Beaumont left me. I leave these nuns under the same rules they came with, and as you will not have a Superior-General you cannot find fault with a Convent governed by a particular Superior.

“5. You say I owe nothing to Mgr. of Namur. I may tell you that both before the Revolution and since, I have been much more intimate with him

than with the Bishop of Amiens, whom I scarcely know at all. I like and esteem both these respected colleagues, but why should I blame what the Bishop of Namur does, in order to please the Bishop of Amiens? And if, while he received all the emigrant nuns, I had not kept them in my diocese, should I not have appeared to censure what my colleague did?

“6. You tell me these nuns belong to Mgr. of Amiens; they came into my diocese under my predecessor. Besides, as neither you nor your Bishop will have a Superior-General, theirs cannot be considered by you as a true congregation, but only as consisting of isolated communities. Every Bishop has equal right and jurisdiction over all such associations existing in his diocese, for, properly speaking, we have now no real religious orders, and above all we have no communities of nuns exempted from episcopal jurisdiction.

“7. You maintain ‘that it would be very easy for me to conciliate the parties.’ No one has asked me to do that, and how could there be agreement on this point between one Bishop who wants changes in this congregation, and another who receives the emigrant nuns in his diocese? Besides ‘these two respected Bishops have had only to congratulate themselves on their correspondence regarding this business.’ As they are

completely in harmony, what need is there to conciliate those who agree so happily?

"8. Before concluding, I cannot pass over in silence your saying now that there are thirteen nuns on your side, instead of two, according to Mgr. of Amiens, and six, according to your own note. It would have been more straightforward to say thirteen from the first, but it did not, seemingly, suit you at that time. You add, that *four of these new subjects have had a long trial with the 'Dames de l'Instruction chrétienne,' and were formed under your supervision for the new Institute*; which means that long before this reform of yours you were preparing in another association the means of putting an end to that of Sister Julie. Is this frankness and loyalty? The interest I take in you prompts me to advise you not to judge and blame a Bishop, and not to meddle with so many matters. For my part, I have kept what I found, and I have left things as they were.

"Accept, Sir, the assurance of my sincere attachment.

“✠ MAURICE, Bishop of Ghent.”

CHAPTER XV

Vindication

THE tribulations of the Institute in France had not been ended by the transference of the Mother House to Belgium. No sooner had the last Sisters left for Namur than M. de Sambucy set to work to organize the new community. He proceeded to transplant to the Faubourg-Noyon four novices of the Dames du Sacré Cœur—or, as they were then called, Dames de l'Instruction Chrétienne—one of whom, Marie Elizabeth Prévost, a person of good sense and judgement but of only nine months' standing in religion, he named Superior. Blessed Sophie Barat, though in Amiens at the time, was not even consulted on this summary disposal of her daughters.

Mère Victoire had, by now, somewhat gone down in the Abbé's estimation, and as she could not accommodate herself to the new Superior he sent her off to Rubempré. Next, the Superior of the house at Montdidier, Sister Marie Caroline, was summoned to Amiens, and detained there for several days, during which time she was

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plied with exhortations both by the Bishop and M. de Sambucy to sever herself and her convent from Julie Billiart. But Montdidier stood firm. Forbidden to correspond with the Foundress, the Sisters had been comforted and encouraged by letters from Mère Blin de Bourdon and Sister Catherine Daullée, who, it will be remembered, had governed their little establishment before her transference to St-Nicolas. The spirited appeal of the latter, dated February 21, 1809, deserves to be quoted:

“My very dear Sisters in Our Lord Jesus— Oh! how good God is! One feels it most of all in the midst of the crosses and trials which He lays on us with the Hand of a Father.

“Ah! my dear Sisters, often have I thought of you since I left you to come here, how much more often since all these events which Our Lord is allowing for our greater good. How anxious I was to know how matters stood with you! The only thing which stopped my zeal from writing to you sooner was that I was not sure where you were; I thought that possibly you had followed our good Mother. But at last a letter from herself, telling me that dear Sister Angélique* has fallen ill from sheer grief, shows me that you remain true to her. At the same

* Sister Angélique Bicheron, died at Namur, 1825.

time I learn that you have been forbidden to write to her, for she has written to you and none of you have answered. How, then, my good Sisters? Was it she that issued this prohibition? Oh! I think not, for she loves her daughters whom she brought forth upon the cross too tenderly to deprive them of such a consolation. But if it is not she who forbids you to write, tell me, pray, who has power to do so. No one can hinder true Sisters of Notre-Dame from following their Mother everywhere, even to the ends of the world; if not in deed, at least in heart and by letter. If you are Mère Julie's daughters, show your courage and write to her. Assuredly, nothing should hinder me from writing to her save her own command to that effect, a command I know well she would never give. Although I am nearer to her than you, and further from Amiens, they keep urging me to remain attached to the Amiens House. With the grace of God, I will do nothing of the sort. I answered that if I am to be asked to leave Mère Julie, rather than do so I shall immediately leave St-Nicolas. Ah! my dear Sisters, more than a year ago they tried to detach me from my good Mother. I did not see their intention at the time, but God has enlightened me since, and the present events are a proof. Stand firm, my Sisters; know for certain that our good Mother carries you deep down in

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her heart and will never abandon you so long as you cling to our primitive spirit. My dear Sisters, I cannot tell you what zeal and courage animate me as I write this. If I had wings, I would fly to you at once to testify to my convictions and to encourage you to show yourselves daughters of our Mère Julie. If they will have nothing to do with you under that name, her heart is wide open to receive you. I know the assaults you have, and will have, to sustain on all hands; but stand firm. . . . As for me, I have but one principle of action in the matter, to follow our Mother. Whatever she does not accept, were an angel from heaven to beg me to accept it, I would not receive. M. de Sambucy wrote me a letter saying that God had effected a separation, that Mère Julie was at Namur with almost all her daughters, but that he hoped I should always remain united to the house at Amiens. Would you like to hear my answer? 'Sir, you ask me to give you news of myself from time to time. The first thing I have the honour to tell you is that I no longer recognize Amiens as the cradle of my Order if the government which God had put into Mère Julie's hands is to be taken from her. If she is no more to be considered as belonging to the house at Amiens, then I shall follow her wherever she goes. It is useless to speak to me of rules, or to make any other proposals to me; I have one

intention only, which is, *to follow my Mother, to follow my Mother*. If you ask me to leave Mère Julie, I at once leave St-Nicolas and the diocese of Ghent. That is my fixed determination, for not having pledged myself in any way either to the Bishop of Ghent or the Bishop of Amiens, I am perfectly free. All for the greater glory of God.' So do not be so timid, my dear Sisters; you at Montdidier are no more pledged than I here; you can never be compelled to remain there. If they tell you that the Amiens house is the cradle of the others, our cradle, Sisters, must always be where the primitive spirit lives and not elsewhere. If they tell you that the other foundations remain attached to Amiens, that is not so, for St-Nicolas and Jumet are ready to throw up everything to follow our Mother. Let it be our pride to follow her wheresoever she is, let it be our happiness to feel that we are children of such a Mother. If we share her crosses here below, we shall share the crown which awaits her in heaven. Be convinced that God did not restore her health to no purpose. Though all the powers of hell should be let loose upon us, let us fear nothing, dear Sisters; all new foundations have had their trials—a certain sign that they are the work of God. Far from letting them depress our courage, let them rather reanimate it: there is no victory without combat, no road to heaven but

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that of the Cross. The more crosses we have, the more we ought to thank our good God. Everything else may indeed be taken from us, but God we shall find everywhere. Courage, Sisters, courage! The pain is little and soon over, the joy will be eternal. Let us face all the difficulties we meet with in God's holy service; let us carry our cross gaily—our dear Jesus Himself carries three-quarters of it, and he carries ourselves with the other quarter in His divine Heart. In the cross virtue is purified as gold in the furnace. . . . Our Mother would not speak so strongly, for she will force no one. It is not any letters of hers to me that have made me take up this attitude, neither has she dictated a word of what I have said to you; God Himself has guided my pen. Do bear in mind that you cannot be forced to anything.

“Sisters, Sisters, oh! my dear Sisters, it is a sister who loves you tenderly in God who speaks thus to you; and what I urge on you I myself am prepared to do with the grace of God—for I look for many fresh attacks, and Our Lord is trying us, too, at St-Nicolas in more ways than one. . . . Pray for me that I may bear the cross with a willing heart.”

After this, we are not surprised that when Mme. Prévost was commissioned to win over

the Sisters at Montdidier by a personal interview, all her gentle efforts at persuasion proved unavailing.

Ultimately their firmness overcame the assaults to which they were subjected; they obtained permission to join their Superior-General in Belgium, and went to await a favourable opportunity of doing so at Plessier-sur-St-Just. Now it happened that just at this juncture the Foundress had arrived at Picardy with a postulant whom she was returning to her family as unsuited to the Institute. She sent a note to Montdidier, refraining, however, through motives of prudence, from entering the convent herself. The Sisters had already left, but Mme. Prévost went at once to meet Julie at the hotel. She spoke to her of effecting a reunion, but in such terms that the Servant of God saw clearly that the idea was out of the question. "Madame," she said simply at the close of the conversation, "you will do a good work at Amiens and we at Namur, with the help of God." From Montdidier Mère Julie passed to Plessier in order to learn news of her daughters from her old friend the Curé, M. Trouvelot, *le bon par excellence*, as she calls him; but as she was turning a street corner, she suddenly met all three of them. The joy and surprise may be imagined, and no time was lost in setting off together for Ghent, taking with them a postulant

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for whom Mère Julie's presence had at once and unexpectedly obtained the long-refused permission to follow her vocation.

An anecdote has come down to us from one of the travellers which reads like a page of the *Fioretti* of St. Francis. As they left Plessier, they came face to face with a mad dog, which had already bitten a great number of persons. The Sister was terrified, but Julie said to her: "Do not be afraid, daughter, God is with us"; and when the animal had come close up to her, she said to it very sweetly and gently: "Let us pass, my friend; we are the little servants of the Lord, and are going to do His work." Then the dog became quiet for a space, and allowed them to pass without doing them any harm; after which it was again rabid and dangerous as before.

This was by no means the last visit of the Servant of God to her native land. It will be remembered that a considerable sum of money belonging to the Institute was still in the hands of M. de Sambucy, and no less than nine times between the years 1809 and 1810 had she to traverse that road to Picardy which for so many years had been to her a way of sorrows. The first occasion was in September, 1809. In a spirit of poverty Julie got out of the *diligence* at Lille and walked no less than fifteen miles to the farm of one of the tenants on Mère

Blin de Bourdon's estates who was to take her on to Amiens. Farmer Lempence was exceedingly stout and his country cart exceedingly narrow; during the long drive of nearly forty miles through wind and rain, Mère Julie could not move a limb, and her spirit was even more fatigued than her body by the ceaseless talk of her companion on the one topic he understood—crops, and profits, and the buying and selling of land.

The interviews with Mère Victoire and the Abbé which this affair entailed were necessarily painful, and only considerations of justice and of God's glory could have induced her to pursue the matter. But the decision of Père Varin, to whom Mme. de Franssu had referred the question, and the opinion of Père Enfantin, were formal. The authority of Père Thomas, as well as Mère Julie's gentleness and straightforward dealing, finally brought M. de Sambucy to the point, and the money was refunded.

Unfortunately for the poor Foundress, it was delivered to her in coin, and so, too, was the price of the sale of Mère Blin de Bourdon's property. Many a time at recreation did Julie make the Sisters merry with the adventures of the two baskets which she had to carry back with her to Namur—the terrors she underwent when she had to entrust them to other hands to lift them in or out of the

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coach, her anxiety as they drove along for the safety of the large basket under the seat and the small basket on her knee, the indiscreet curiosity of the coachman and waiters at the inns as they felt the unusual weight of this luggage, and finally her joy when they stopped at Courtrai before the house of her old friend M. Vercruysse, where the whole household welcomed her visit, as they always did, as a blessing from heaven.

Père Vercruysse, S.J., writes:

"Mère Julie, the saintly Foundress of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, made a very deep impression on us children. This was at first mingled with awe, caused probably by her singular costume, but very soon fear gave place to love; she drew us by her caresses, her gifts of pious pictures, and her air of sanctity. As we did not know French, we could not talk to her; but we all understood her oft-repeated and incomparable: '*Que le Bon Dieu est bon.*' More than once, at the request of my parents, she gave me her blessing, which has profited me not a little."

Connected with these journeys to and from France are several incidents which may conveniently be grouped together here.

In the June of 1810 Julie was in Paris, where, amongst other old friends, she went to see Jose-

phine Doria, now a Visitation nun, and M. Montaigne, Director of the Seminary of St-Sulpice. To the latter, who had helped her so much in former trials, she laid open her soul, and, with her usual frankness, accused herself of having replied with some vivacity to a reproach addressed to her by the Bishop of Ghent. The Abbé Montaigne knew well with whom he had to do. "Mother," he said, "that is not the way to speak to a bishop; you must repair that fault without delay." And Julie went straight back to Ghent to throw herself at the feet of Mgr. de Broglie and entreat his pardon. Mgr. Poncelet, afterwards Vicar-General at Namur and Domestic Prelate to his Holiness, was then a young seminarist at St-Sulpice, and had the story from the lips of M. Montaigne himself. "They tell me," the Abbé had said to him in conclusion, "they tell me she was cured by a miracle; it may be so, but I value that act of humility and obedience more than any miracle."

This journey was made at Whitsuntide, and Julie writes to her children at Namur:

"I hope that on my return I shall find souls quite renewed in the Holy Ghost. Carry to Him, dear daughters, all your faults and failings, that the fire of His divine love may burn them all away. He is the Spirit of Love, and He has no dearer wish than to consume all our miseries,—

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yes, those of Mother and daughters alike; I have so many! Pray earnestly that I may not be so unfaithful to the movements of His grace, to the pressure of His finger on my heart, that He may burn up all, all which is of me and not of Him. Let us all put ourselves very close to this sweet and precious Spirit, that He may purify us wholly. He wills it, He can do it; oh! dear Sisters, do not let us put so many obstacles to His action within us."

And then she adds with charming grace:

"I should like very much to be with you, but 'my Father's business' calls me elsewhere. He needs some little messengers to go His errands, and He has been good enough to choose me for one—it is too great a happiness. There are many circumstances which I should not at all enjoy if it were not for such a good Father. For Him we must work, suffer, die. Let us die then, my soul, die to the sweet consolation of being with those who are so dear."

About six leagues distant from Amiens is the Château of Hénencourt, the residence of the Marchioness de Lameth, aunt of the Bishop of Ghent. Here Mère Julie once stopped in order to consult the prelate, then on a visit to his aunt. She found him just stepping into his carriage.

"Mère Julie," he said kindly, "I must take my drive; go in to my aunt." The marchioness put a room at her disposal, and the Servant of God, as usual, found the means of employing her enforced leisure in doing good to souls. The little daughter of Mme. de Lameth's maid happening to come in, Julie began to hear her the catechism, and then went on to explain it with so much charm and unction that the child, delighted, knelt down to pray for rain, "so that the good mother who spoke so well of the good God might not go too soon." On the Prince's return she was invited to dinner with himself, the marchioness, and several ecclesiastics—no light mortification for her who, say the *Memoirs*, seldom had any appetite, and felt an invincible repugnance for made dishes or any but the plainest and commonest food. "She sometimes told me," adds Mère St-Joseph, "that she had no need to fear sensuality in eating, for that she had lost all sense of taste. She insisted that there was no virtue in this, and I am quite willing to allow that her long illnesses had something to do with it, but I think also that her soul was so united to God that it was no longer susceptible of pleasure in this matter."*

Hénencourt is close to Rubempré, where her niece Félicité, who had married the schoolmaster, was living in very narrow circumstances. Julie

* *Mem.* vol. II, 82.

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sent for her, and when the poor woman arrived, emaciated and shabbily dressed, the very picture of poverty, at once asked the servants of the château to bring her wine and refreshments; then, with some of her burning words, strengthened her soul in that patience under tribulation of which, in bygone days, she had herself set her so beautiful an example. Some of Julie's biographers extol this incident as an heroic act of humility. To smaller souls it would doubtless have been so, but, if we mistake not the spirit of our Saint, Julie simply could not have acted otherwise, and it would not have entered her mind that she could be humiliated by acknowledging her own. The deed, like many another in her life, was but part of her integral truth. So, too, at Amiens, when her crippled brother, also extremely poor, used to come on his donkey to see her, Julie always welcomed him before every one with the tenderest affection, and assuredly without any intent of elaborate humiliation.

Mgr. de Broglie went on from Hénencourt to Amiens, where he saw both Mgr. Demandolx and the Abbé de Sambucy. The result was almost inevitable, and when, a little later, the Servant of God, in perfect ignorance, came to Ghent on business, she was subjected, in the presence of M. Van Schouwenberghe, to a most painful scene of reproach and humiliation from the Bishop. The

Secretary himself, however, always remained her unshaken champion. Once, in the midst of this storm of persecution, he asked her if she did not fear for her work: "I will fear," was her beautiful answer, "when God shall cease to be my Father." Nor were Mgr. de Broglie's unfavourable impressions anything more than a passing cloud, destined like so many others, says Mère St-Joseph, to detach the Servant of God more and more from all human support. "Men are but men," she cries somewhere. "God alone, God alone! The good God is not like creatures, He does not change; His promises are as stable as Himself."

Somewhat inconsistently, it would seem, the Abbé de Sambucy was now earnestly pressing the return of the Foundress to the convent at Amiens. But Julie had met the suggestion with a tone of decision that put an end to all arguments: "When a king exiles a subject," she said, "that subject cannot return unless recalled by his Sovereign. I shall not set foot in the house of the Faubourg until I am recalled by the Bishop." And, as time went on, it was evident that the convent at Amiens was dying a natural death. The author of its misfortunes ultimately paid the penalty of his imprudence. One after another his rash projects fell through, and in the middle of the year 1812 he was carried off from Amiens by the Imperial Police on some suspicion of interference in politics.

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After a species of confinement in Paris he contrived, under the Restoration, to go to Rome as Secretary of the French Ambassador, Mgr. Cor-
tois de Pressigny. He made one more vain attempt to interfere with the nuns of the Sacred Heart, but his intrigues were finally unveiled, his acts were disowned by his patrons, and he was obliged to leave Rome. He returned to France as anxious as ever to exert his zeal, but considerably lowered in public estimation. He died in 1848, titular Canon of the Church of Notre-Dame in Paris.

This unfortunate adviser once out of the way, the eyes of the episcopal and clerical authorities at Amiens were opened, and they saw clearly how completely he had misled them. Mgr. Demandolx lost no time in endeavouring to repair his error and its fatal consequences. He wrote to the Bishop of Namur to express his regret at having been so deceived, and his desire to reinstate the Foundress in her proper position as head of all the houses of her Institute in his diocese. Père Sellier was charged with making the first overtures. In a letter dated September, 1812, he informed Mère Julie that he had undertaken to speak to M. Fournier, the Vicar-General, about her, and to suggest that it was now time to recall the Foundress to Amiens. "It is more than time," cried her former adversary; "we have been deceived! yes, deceived! But do you think she will be willing to return to

us?" "I am sure she will." "Well, then, I shall speak to the Bishop about it." A few days later Père Sellier sent to Mère Julie the following letter from M. Fournier:

"Sir,—It is a real pleasure to me to inform you that our Bishop approves with all his heart the project of recalling Mère Julie. Her return would give us an opportunity of repairing the error which we were induced to commit with regard to this holy person. Therefore, Sir, will you let her know our wishes and persuade her to come back as soon as possible, in order to confer with his Lordship and to make all necessary arrangements? For my part I shall see her amongst us again with a real satisfaction, in which all my colleagues will share.—FOURNIER, *Vicar-General.*"

The Servant of God was at Lille, for some temporal affairs of the Institute, when this letter reached her. Hers was not a heart to rejoice over her justification before men; neither would she act without consulting the Bishop of Namur and Mère Blin de Bourdon. "I shall not go quite so quickly as they seem to wish," she writes familiarly on October 10, 1812; "we must let the good God have time to complete His work; nothing succeeds when we go precipitately before Him."

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Shortly afterwards the Bishop of Amiens sent her the following autograph letter :

“Amiens, October 23, 1812.

“M. Sellier has undertaken, my dear daughter, to express to you the desire I have to see you back at Amiens, in order to take up again the superiority of the Sisters of Notre-Dame in my diocese, which you left in consequence of an error caused by one whom I believed I could trust. Now, more enlightened, I am not afraid to own to you that I have been deceived in your regard. I urge you then, my dear daughter, to return as soon as possible, if not to fix yourself here at once, at least to make the arrangements which the new order of things will necessitate. You may depend upon the most cordial welcome from Sister Mary [Prévost] and her companions, who will be enchanted to submit to your authority, as they have unanimously assured me. You will meet with no obstacle, and I will make every effort to second you. I can certify that every one will be anxious to manifest the satisfaction given by your return. You can undertake from here the journey you have in view* when you have made all the arrangements which you consider desirable. I flatter myself, my dear daughter, that you will con-

* Probably to Fontainebleau, where the Servant of God went four months later.

cur in my wishes, and that you will not doubt my good will nor my paternal affection.

“✠ J.-FR., *Bishop of Amiens.*”

As nothing was said about the mode of government which was to be adopted in future for the Sisters of Notre-Dame in the diocese of Amiens, Julie thought it well to reply in her usual straightforward manner.

“My Lord—I am exceedingly grateful for the letter I have had the honour to receive from your Lordship, in which you are good enough to favour me with your confidence by wishing to make me Superior of your house of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. I should like to be able to comply immediately with your wishes, and to carry out your views, but I have thought it right to lay before you the following explanation:

“I feel myself bound by the engagements I have taken to have no fixed residence, having to look after several small houses just beginning in Flanders, without reckoning others which are being offered, and which are deferred on account of circumstances. It is therefore impossible for me to fix myself in one place or another; I have to come and go according to the needs of the moment; such is the spirit of our Institute. I return, it is true, to Namur after my visits, because it is

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in that house that we have our novices and postulants. I do not know, my Lord, if this dependence of the different houses would be according to your views; as all are on the same footing, I could not make any change; my superiors feel as I do about this. Be assured, my Lord, that it would be an extreme pleasure to me to second your projects as far as lies in my power. I omit mentioning to your Lordship certain local difficulties with which I have acquainted M. Sellier."

Whatever the Bishop's former notions had been, the following letter leaves no room for doubt that at this moment he admitted the government of a Superior-General. It is dated November 1, 1812.

"Either I must have explained myself badly, my dear daughter, or you must have misunderstood me. It was in nowise my design to make you quit Namur and establish yourself at Amiens; but looking on you as the Superior-General of your Institute, I would simply ask you to come here to visit your convent, and to make all the reforms in it you think advisable, so that the same spirit may reign amongst you all. Come, then, as soon as possible, so as to consolidate by your presence an establishment which ought to be dear to you as the birthplace of your Con-

gregation, and which I would fain consider its Mother-House (though I do not insist on this).

“✠ J.-FR., *Bishop of Amiens.*”

Equally pressing were the messages Julie received from the community of the Faubourg-Noyon, who wrote her a general letter calling for her, as she says, *à cor et à cri*. After having taken the opinion of her council and the Bishop of Namur, she was convinced that God had manifested His Will, and that whatever difficulties might await her, they had to be faced. She writes to Sister Anastasie Leleu at Jumet that God will send His holy Angel, as He did to Tobias, to show her the way; so she has no fear. “Our good Jesus is our Way, our Life, our Truth.” She thinks there is both for and against in this business. The good God will enlighten her about it if it pleases Him. The good Sisters must pray, so that they may all do in all things the holy Will of God, for that is what really matters most. And she ends the letter with one of those short sayings of hers, noble in their simplicity—“Let us do God’s work in a manner worthy of Him.” But through all the correspondence relating to this affair it is clear that she herself felt the conviction that the proposed reunion would never take place. “What will be the end? God knows; this should be enough for

me. I have to go; the councillors all think it is God's Will. . . . Persevering trust, fidelity in everything; you must be the good odour of Jesus Christ." And so with closed eyes and her hand tight clasped in that of her good God, she left Namur on November 9, 1812. At Ghent she took up as her companion Sister Catherine Daul-lée, Superior at Nouveau-Bois. Using this opportunity to give her daughters a grand lesson in religious obedience, she named as temporary Superior, in the absence of Sister Catherine, Sister Angela Witmeere, a virtuous and sensible person, but employed hitherto only in domestic work. She gave her the place of honour at her right hand until she left Ghent, and when the poor Sister entreated to be at least dispensed from giving the conference at Chapter, replied: "Daughter, you will hold the Chapter and you will give the conference. Begin your exhortation with these words:—'He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me;' those are Our Lord's own words, addressed to all who exercise authority in His Name. Afterwards you can make any remarks or give any admonitions to your community which you may judge desirable."

Arrived at Amiens, Mère Julie and her companions hastened to pay their respects to Mgr. Demandolx, who confirmed by word of mouth

all that he had written to the Servant of God. On the following day he transmitted to her an official document, formally establishing the dependence of all the houses of the Sisters of Notre-Dame on their Superior-General.*

* The text of this document runs thus:

Jean-François Demandolx, by the grace of God and favour of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Amiens, Beauvais and Noyon, etc., to Julie Billiard, religious of Notre-Dame, health and benediction in the Lord. Intimately convinced of the precious advantages which must result from unity of rules, of functions, of custom, of costume, and in general of an entire uniformity among the Sisters of the Association called of Notre-Dame, and thoroughly informed of your wisdom, prudence and other good qualities, We declare that We have recognised you, as by these presents We do recognise you, as Superior-General of all the houses of the Association of the Sisters of Notre-Dame which are, or which in the future shall be, established in Our diocese, and to this effect We give you all the same powers, rights and privileges which have been granted to you in the said capacity or appellation by the Bishops of those dioceses wherein the said Sisters of Notre-Dame have establishments. We recommend in consequence, and furthermore expressly enjoin on each of the Sisters of the Association called of Notre-Dame who are, and who shall be in the future, anywhere within Our diocese, to show to you at all times and in all circumstances the respect, submission and obedience due to their Superior-General.

These presents shall be read in presence of the whole Community established in the Faubourg-Noyon of the city of Amiens, and transcribed on to their Register; and the Superior shall communicate them to all the Sisters dispersed in the houses of Our diocese, so that none shall be able to plead ignorance thereof.

Given at Amiens, under Our hand and seal, and countersigned by Our Secretary, Monday, the sixteenth of November, of the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and twelve.

✠ J.-FR., *Bishop of Amiens.*

By command, etc.,

(Place of the Seal.)

GRAVET, CANON, *Secretary.*

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At the same time he addressed the following letter to Sister Marie Prévost:

“Bishop’s Palace, Amiens, November 17, 1812.

“I am forwarding to you, my dear Sister, the Act which constitutes good Mère Julie Superior-General of the houses of the Sisters of Notre-Dame now established, or henceforward to be established, in this diocese. I am convinced that no one amongst you will refuse to recognise her as such. In any case, Mère Julie will use her authority towards any who may refuse adhesion to this essential change. His lordship determines nothing with regard to the ownership of the house which you now occupy. But he hopes that you will take no final measures about this house without consulting him. Besides, before any project of removal, you must make sure of obtaining another, either at your own expense or that of the city.

“Accept, etc.,

“FOURNIER, *V.G.*”

Finally, the venerable prelate sent to Mgr. Pisani the following letter, which is as honourable to himself by its frank acknowledgement of error, as it is to her whose public justification it completed. The original is still preserved in the archives of the Institute at Namur.

“My Lord,—I cannot do otherwise than own to you that I have had to reproach myself exceedingly for having followed the pernicious advice that was given me, inducing me to send the good Mère Julie out of my diocese. The harm done by her departure was so serious that I found myself on the point of losing several precious institutions if I had not hastened to recall her, and if you, on your side, had not urged her to yield to my pressing entreaties. Her return has filled me with joy, and I have been as much touched as pleased by the reception she has met with from her former community, and by the holy eagerness with which the Superior whom I had appointed there resigned her post, protesting to Mère Julie that she did so with all her heart, being only too happy to live henceforward in dependence and as the last of her Sisters. All is not yet definitely settled. But I have begun the work by recognising Mère Julie as Superior-General of her Congregation. I have forwarded to her the Act of her nomination, not forgetting her title of Foundress, and I now indulge a well-grounded hope that, under the direction of this excellent religious, her Congregation will begin a new life in my diocese. Thus, my Lord, it is to you, after God, that I shall be beholden for the great good which Providence is about to work through her instrumentality. Accept the assurance of the sincere and

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respectful attachment with which I am, my Lord,

“Your most humble and obedient servant,

“✠ J.-FR., *Bishop of Amiens.*”

Nothing was now wanting to the complete rehabilitation of the Blessed Julie Billiard in the town where she had been brought into opposition with her ecclesiastical superiors. She had long since forgotten the wrongs done to her, and she now met those same superiors with the utmost openness and cordiality. But notwithstanding all the good will of the Bishop and clergy of Amiens, there were certain grave difficulties in the way. The principal of these was the insolvent condition of the house in the Faubourg. Julie had already heard of this before her arrival, probably through Père Sellier, and had, with her usual activity, sought for a remedy. On her way through Ghent she had spoken to a merchant there, a nephew of M. Duminy, Curé of Amiens Cathedral. He was removing into Picardy, and asked the Foundress, in case she had to part with the house in the Faubourg, to let him have the refusal of it. He went to look at the house, found it suitable, and agreed to pay ten thousand francs indemnity for the improvements made in the building before Mère Julie had been sent away from Amiens. This sum went towards paying the

debts of the community. The Servant of God sincerely desired to help the good nuns in their embarrassment and to arrange for their future maintenance; but all the resources failed at once. Mme. de Franssu had, at the invitation of Père Enfantin, gone to found an institution of her own at Valence; the boarding-school contained only ten pupils, who rather increased the expenses than otherwise; and the young Superior was apparently wanting in administrative capacity. Now that she had relieved the Sisters of the Faubourg of their house and the heavy rent due to the Bishop, Julie's next step was to find another dwelling for them. She writes playfully to Mère St-Joseph: "People are offering me houses on all sides for forty or sixty thousand francs: and I running all over the town to find one for nothing! It is your name, my dear, which gives me this great reputation. The immediate need is to pay the debts. . . . I wait for God to show us what it is best to do."

After a long search, a refuge for the community was found in an old convent of the order of Fontevrault, which went by the name of "The Moreaucourt." A part of the building was still habitable, and it was offered to the Sisters, together with a small allowance, for teaching the girls employed in a cotton factory established close by. For want of anything better Mother

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Prévost closed with this offer, and about the same time Mère Julie, with a view to the relief of the community of the Faubourg, accepted the proposal of the Count de Rainneville to establish two or three Sisters, to whom he guaranteed a small income, in the schoolhouse of Rainneville itself, six miles from Amiens. Sister Marie Hénocque was named Superior of this little foundation, which opened prosperously.

But the Servant of God still hesitated to conclude the reunion between her own daughters and the Sisters of Amiens; in the whole of this affair she moved with the utmost caution, and only step by step. During the three weeks which she passed in Picardy, she spoke little, but she observed and watched everything, preserving her soul in peace, and holding herself ready to obey the faintest indication of the Divine Will. Without finding in the community of the Faubourg grave defects, she felt at every turn that its spirit was different from that which she had tried to form in her daughters. "God often gave to His servant," writes Mère St-Joseph, "clear and strong lights. Brief and rapid as their passage was, she yet could not neglect them, knowing well from experience the grace which guided her, and which had so often helped her out of her difficulties; but she would not act upon them without advice."

"Sometimes," she said, "I see clearly, as if the thing were to be; at other times all is darkness, and I know not where I am. . . . My God, please help me! My good friend, just as I entered the house in the Faubourg, the good God said these two words to me: *Look at Me, and follow Me.* From that moment I do nothing but look to see where my good God intends to lead me."*

Two days later her words are still more significant and remarkable:

"Time is a great master, I prefer to let it pass; it will teach us a good many things. I go quietly on day by day. I wait for the good God, I look at Him, I follow Him. . . . This is the one cry of my heart—'My God, what wilt Thou have me to do? Mary, my good Mother, protect me!' I trust that God will bless these dispositions which His goodness has put into my heart. We have a difficult work in hand; I want prayers, and many of them. When, on entering that house, *as I told you*, I met our dear Jesus fleeing from Amiens, He saw very well what my repugnance was. . . . My God, Thou wilt deliver us, if it please Thee!"

There is a tradition in the Institute, confirmed by this letter, that at the moment when Julie crossed the threshold of the house in the Fau-

* Letter to Mère Blin, November 21, 1812.

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bourg, she had an apparition of Our Blessed Lord carrying His Cross. He seemed to be moving away from the convent, and, at the same time, fixing His eyes upon Julie, He said to her these words: "Look at Me, and follow Me; I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* The Servant of God was so habitually reserved with regard to any extraordinary favours, that the Sisters knew very little about this one. The letter to which she alludes in the words "as I told you" no longer exists. When, after the death of Blessed Julie, she who had so well known and loved her used to read her letters aloud to the Sisters, she would stop at this passage, saying that Mère Julie had forbidden her to speak of "this meeting with her dear Jesus." "You will know all that in heaven," she would answer when we questioned her, and if we insisted she would say: "Mère Julie would not be pleased if I spoke, for she made me tear up the letter she wrote me from Amiens in which she related to me what Our Lord had said to her and shown her."†

Charity may have combined with humility to suggest this prohibition; the picture of Our Lord withdrawing from the house in the Faubourg might have given an unfavourable impression of the community there.

* *Process, De Fama Sanctitatis.*

† *Souvenirs of Sister Reine Cambier.*

The words, "Look at Me and follow Me" occur several times in the letters to Mère Blin de Bourdon. And to Sister St-John, Superior of St-Hubert, Julie wrote after her return: "I can only tell you one word about the Amiens business; it is this, that I did nothing but follow the good God very quietly."*

Early in December, seeing that matters were provisionally arranged, she returned to Ghent with Sister Catherine. She entered the house at Nouveau-Bois alone, and sent for Sister Angèle and the Councillors to the parlour, in order to ascertain from them whether the community had been faithful in every detail of religious submission. The report being entirely favourable, Mère Julie reinstated Sister Catherine in her post, saying to the assembled Sisters: "If I had had any complaints, I should have taken Sister Catherine to Namur. I give you back the Superior whom you love so much, because, like good religious, you have been obedient to her whom I put in her place." Lessons like these were not easily forgotten in the Institute. The Foundress returned to Namur on December 11, having been obliged by the severe frost to perform a great part of the journey on foot. It would seem as if in the design of God the sole aim of this visit to France had been her own justification, for hardly had she left

* Letter dated December 19, 1812.

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Amiens, overwhelmed with testimonies of affection and esteem, than the house at the Faubourg-Noyon collapsed, and its community was forced to disperse. Letter after letter came from Sister Marie Prévost telling her of new troubles. To the Foundress they looked like couriers of Providence announcing its dissolution. The administrators of "The Moreaucourt"—for what reason is unknown—withdrawed the house and the promised school fees from the Sisters. Soon afterwards M. Duminy's nephew asked to be released from his engagement, as he had found a more convenient residence than the house in the Faubourg. Finally Sister Prévost herself, worn out with all these difficulties, began to long for rest and turned towards her first religious home with the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. Finding that she had only been lent to Notre-Dame, she announced to Mère Julie her wish to return. The Servant of God saw that it was useless to try to keep her, and she did not make the attempt. She simply replied to Madame Prévost that "as things were, the house had dissolved itself, that it was not her doing but God's." There was no chance whatever of keeping it up as a house of education; it had entirely lost the confidence of the public, as Mère Julie had clearly seen when she was at Amiens. Of the Sisters, one or two followed Madame Prévost to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and several in

very delicate health returned to their families. When the Servant of God had been fully informed of all that had taken place, she wrote to M. Fournier, the Vicar-General, to acquaint him with the facts; she pointed out to him the impossibility of maintaining a community at Amiens under the circumstances, and asked to have it suppressed by diocesan authority. The Vicar-General replied:

“AMIENS, January 7, 1813.

“My Dear Sister—Our Prelate, after reading the letter which you addressed to me, is convinced that the convent at Amiens cannot be carried on for any length of time without contracting fresh debts, so long as there are no more resources to fall back upon than we have at present. He can therefore only approve the step you propose taking. I trust you will always consider the Sisters of Notre-Dame in the other houses as your daughters, and that you will avail yourself of your authority as Superior-General to keep, or to dismiss, those who are fit, or unfit, for your Congregation. His Lordship leaves all this to your well-known prudence and charity. Our Prelate was ignorant of Sister Marie's intentions; she did not tell us of them any more than of the debts she had contracted. Do as you think best in her regard according to the judgement you have formed about her. Receive, my very dear

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Sister, the thanks both of his Lordship and myself for the prayers you address to God for us. Accept ours in exchange; they are all offered for your own consolation and for the success of your undertakings for the glory of God and the welfare of souls. I entreat the Lord to continue to shower His blessings upon you. I recommend myself to your prayers, assuring you of the sincere and respectful sentiments with which I am, etc.,

"FOURNIER, *V.G.*"*

It was decided that the furniture of the Amiens convent should be sold to liquidate the debts as far as the price would go, the deficit to be supplied by the Bishop. Mère Julie, who had had no share in the expenses since her departure, held herself aloof; she could not deprive of their daily bread the houses which she had to support, nor place herself in the impossibility of making fresh foundations. The only objects she claimed for herself were the tabernacle and ciborium given to her by Mme. de Franssu; these were restored to her when the affairs were wound up. They are still preserved with religious veneration at the Mother-House, Namur.

The dissolution of the remaining houses of Notre-Dame in France followed close upon that of Amiens. These were Montdidier, Rubempré,

* *Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 192.

Rainneville and Bresles in the diocese of Amiens, and Ambleville in the diocese of Paris. Long before this, in 1811, at the express request of Mgr. d'Aviau, the establishment at Bordeaux had been severed from its affiliation, though the most cordial relations continued to exist between the two Congregations, and the prelate spoke in terms of the highest praise of the Foundress. Early in the spring of 1813, Julie, according to a promise she had made to Mgr. Demandolx, left Belgium in order to make the visitation of her French convents. She went first to Rainneville, thence to Amiens to see the Bishop. From this latter place she wrote to Mère St. Joseph:

“I have just come from Rainneville, and found the little community going on fairly well. May God preserve it, if it be His will that it should last; thorns will not be wanting to it. I saw M. de Rainneville, who speaks as founder; and I, on my side, spoke as foundress, not for the temporal prosperity of the house, but in order to uphold the spirit of our Institute in opposition to his demands. My God! what one has to put up with in treating with these gentlemen and ladies, however good they may be! What a large heart one must have to be a Sister of Notre-Dame! What strong medicine one must be able to swallow! This is the grace I ask for all my daughters—

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that they may be very courageous, very generous."

The little convent at Rainneville had to be given up, perhaps in consequence of the very exigencies on the part of the founders here alluded to. Sister Marie Hénocque returned to the house of the Oratory whence she had come with Mother Prévost; the other Sisters followed Mère Julie. Rubempré, where, it will be remembered, Mère Victoire was Superior, Julie abstained from visiting for reasons sufficiently obvious, which Mgr. Demandolx approved. However, "it happened," say the *Memoirs*, "that Victoire presented herself at the Bishop's house while he was engaged with the Servant of God. His Lordship, who had received some very unfavourable reports of her proceedings, requested Mère Julie to speak with her and exhort her to change her conduct. Through obedience Julie complied, but, gentle as her admonition was, it was ill received, and when the prelate on her return to him inquired in what disposition she had found Victoire, she could only reply, "Like bronze." His Lordship understood that the erring religious was beyond the reach of remonstrance. Not long afterwards she threw off the mask and abandoned her vocation. It must be borne in mind that her first vows were only taken for a year, and she does not seem to have renewed them."

The house at Rubempré was suppressed. At Montdidier the Foundress was received with transports of joy. In spite of the kindness of the excellent Curé, M. Pillon de la Tour, the Sisters were suffering some part of the persecution which had just driven away the Fathers of the Faith and suppressed their college. Their departure, too, had been keenly felt by the Sisters. The Servant of God encouraged them to remain for the sake of their poor children, and promised to see them again before leaving France. After visiting the convent at Ambleville, which had a very brief existence, she went on to Bresles. The place, situated in her native diocese (temporarily united to that of Amiens), had a special interest for her. Here dwelt the family of the director of her childhood, the holy and learned M. Dangicourt, and it was probably on this occasion that she obtained the portrait of him which is still to be seen at Namur. But unfortunately the foundation was beset with the same sort of difficulties as that at Rainneville; the benefactress of the school, Mme. de Gerville, wanted the Sisters to employ themselves in lace-making, embroidery, and other works not in keeping with their vocation. No human considerations could ever make Julie compromise where the spirit of her Institute was concerned, and she foresaw from that moment that the establishment would not be a permanent

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one. To a heart like Julie Billiard's, "moulded," as she says in one of her early letters to Françoise Blin, "to feel very keenly," this breaking of the last threads which bound her to her Picardy and to France must have been no little pain. To her burning apostolic zeal it must have been no little sacrifice that she might no longer scatter its sparks over the land whose village streets and sunny cornfields had heard her first childish exhortations, and where she had gathered together her first companions. But with and out of the pain came to her a supreme consolation. The visitation of her houses had not in fact been the only object of this journey. For a long time she had cherished the project of laying at the feet of Pius VII., then captive at Fontainebleau, the homage of herself and of her daughters. The intense love she bore to the Church and the Pope left her no rest until she had accomplished this act of filial piety. On February 16, 1813, she wrote to Sister Jeanne Godelle: "I have to go to Paris, and please God I shall obtain the blessing of the Holy Father for all my good daughters." Her introduction to His Holiness was apparently procured through the Fathers of the Faith. Fathers Sellier and Leblanc both had frequent communication with the persecuted Pontiff, and we are told by Père Guidée in his *Lives of the Fathers of the Faith* that the latter



HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS VII

*From an Engraving after the picture by Lawrence at Windsor Castle in Cardinal
Wiseman's "Recollections of the Last Four Popes"*

was especially active in transmitting letters and pecuniary assistance to the august captive and to the "black Cardinals." A threat of being arrested led him at last to seek safety in Belgium, and he retired to the house of a priest named Kinet at Andennes, between Namur and Huy.* The foundation of a house of the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Andennes took place immediately after Mère Julie's visit to Fontainebleau, and there is every reason to suppose that *Perè Leblanc* was the prime mover in both these events. Another friend of the Foundress had relations with the Pope. This was M. Danheux, a pious and distinguished layman belonging to Namur. He is known to have made several visits to the captive Pontiff, not without personal risk and great danger of arrest by the Imperial police, who watched very narrowly all who manifested sympathy with His Holiness. M. Danheux held Julie in very high esteem. One of his letters is still kept in the archives of the Institute, in which he speaks of "*notre sainte Mère Julie*." Arrived at Ambleville she took with her as companion a novice named Sister M.-Madeleine Quequet, and proceeded to Fontainebleau. Tradition says she travelled on an ass, she and her companion mounting it by turns. In after years Sister Que-

* M. Kinet was brother-in-law of M. Lemaire-Kinet, of Ghent, whose family was so devoted to Mère Julie.

quet would often relate the story of this memorable pilgrimage—how she was not told why they were going to Fontainebleau, how when there she was left to take care of the donkey in the courtyard of the palace, and how after a very long time of waiting, Mère Julie came out with her face bathed in tears and whispering: "My daughter, I have seen the Holy Father; we have wept together over the troubles of the Church." In her hands she clasped a crucifix which the Sovereign Pontiff had given her, and scarcely spoke again during the journey; she was evidently under the pressure of strong emotion. The interview of the Servant of God with Pius VII. took place during the period when, in penance for having momentarily yielded to the perfidious solicitations of Napoleon, he was abstaining from offering the holy Sacrifice. History has recorded the deep sorrow and bitter self-reproach of the holy old man. In that long interview with the Vicar of Christ did Julie's splendid faith and hope lift the courage of the venerable Pontiff, as she reminded him "how good the good God is"? Or did he, looking into that soul, which, in the words of Cardinal Régnier, "united the impassioned heart of a St. Teresa with the apostolic heart of a St. Francis Xavier," foresee for her consolation the fruits which her suffering congregation was destined to bring forth in the future? We do not



FONTAINE BLEUE

know. No echo has been borne to us down the long years, save the words occurring in letters written immediately following after the event, between the reserve of whose lines we seem still to feel the palpitation of that first deep emotion.

To Mère St-Joseph she writes:

"I am saying nothing of my journey to Paris; it would take volumes! If it please God to give us the grace of seeing each other again, we shall indeed have much to say to each other. . . . I cannot undertake to write about it. My God, what is earth, what is the world?—a place of exile, of banishment! . . . Ah! happy, a thousand times happy, are those who have given themselves up to a life of self-renunciation and sacrifice."

And again to Sister Leleu:

"I say nothing of my journey; it would fill a volume. The good God is very good, my dear friend. Say so to my good daughters. I wish I could make myself heard throughout the universe, to invite all men to join with me in blessing the mercies of our Lord.*

* Letters from Montdidier and Namur, April, 1813

CHAPTER XVI

Spread of the Institute

IN completing the story of the dissolution, we have stepped over several years; we must now take up the account of the different events which filled them.

The tree which had been so violently uprooted from the soil of France was giving forth in Belgium vigorous and healthy shoots in great number. We have already chronicled three of these foundations—at Namur, at Ghent and at Jumet; five more were made in the lifetime of Blessed Julie.

Deep buried in the forest of the Ardennes lies the little town of St-Hubert, with a population of 3,000 souls. It is celebrated for the pilgrimages which for centuries past have been made thither in honour of the great Bishop of Liège whose name it bears. Its beautiful church is dedicated to him, and here sufferers from hydrophobia go to be touched with his relics or his stole. In 1808 this marvel of Gothic art was doomed to destruction, but was saved by the generosity of two of the chief citizens, MM.



SAINT-HUBERT

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Zoude and Doutreloux. This same M. Zoude, in his capacity of mayor of the town, suggested that the municipality should apply to Mère Julie for some of her daughters to direct the schools. By the express desire of Mgr. Pisani she went to St-Hubert in the summer of 1809 and made arrangements with the local authorities, who offered a house and an annual income of about £25 for three Sisters. "With this," writes Mère Blin de Bourdon, "they were provided with the necessary; the superfluous, thanks be to God, has no place in our houses."

The Sisters who had just left Montdidier were ready to occupy the new foundation, except one who was kept at Namur as her delicate health would not have stood the severe climate of the Ardennes. It took the travellers two days and a night to reach their destination, for in those days that picturesque district was almost inaccessible, and had no regular means of communication with the surrounding centres of population.

The Foundress wrote her impressions of the place to Namur. She finds the little house very satisfactory; the two schoolrooms will each hold fifty or sixty children. She and the Sisters have been received with every kind of honour. On the Feast of the Assumption the sub-prefect in full official costume was in the church with his wife, and had made them kneel in his bench. In fact,

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every one at St-Hubert loads them with kindness. Divine Providence will arrange all for the best; she had laid it all in His adorable Heart. On the very day when she is writing, the sub-prefect, the mayor and the other municipal authorities will assist with great solemnity at the formal installation of the Sisters.

Mère Julie passed a week at St-Hubert to establish her daughters at their post and to trace out their line of action, and on her return to Namur continued her instructions in her letters. As they are three in number, she reminds the Sisters, they must represent the earthly trinity, Jesus, Mary and Joseph; and they must honour the adorable Trinity in Heaven by the strictest union, the sweetest charity, the deepest peace. The good seed fell upon good ground; the daughters whom Julie left at St-Hubert showed themselves worthy of their Mother. By degrees the community increased in number, and their works were multiplied. The attachment of the children to their new mistresses showed itself on one occasion in a naive and touching manner in keeping with the simple, old-world ways of the quaint little town. It was the end of the summer holidays of 1810, and Mère Julie was herself taking back to St-Hubert the Sisters who had been making their annual retreat at the Mother-House, as she had to instal a new class-mistress and to introduce



THE CHURCH AT SAINT-HUBERT

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her to the administrators. She set off in a hired carriage with her three daughters; when they were about a mile and a half from the town, they were met by all the children, rich and poor, who, on hearing of their approach, had trooped out from St-Hubert to receive them, and who welcomed them with cries of joy. At the sight of their beloved pupils the travellers got out of the carriage, and, sending on the driver with their luggage, made their entry into the town surrounded by a crowd of happy scholars. The inhabitants had never seen anything like it before, and looked on with admiration. But the children had another surprise in store for their dear mistresses. Of their own accord and at their own cost they had prepared a meal for them in the house, of which one of the eldest girls had the key, and they proceeded to usher the Sisters into it with enthusiastic delight. In 1815 a boarding school was opened, which gave some excellent subjects to the congregation. The Superior, Sister St-John, spent forty years at St-Hubert, where she brought up more than one generation, and was venerated and beloved in no common degree by the inhabitants of the interesting little town.

In November, 1809, the Foundress was invited to Binche by her benefactress, the Baroness de Coppens, who wished to found a school on her

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estate. She made the journey on foot with a peasant for her guide, God giving her the grace, as she wrote, to keep pace with the good man. The negotiations, however, came to nothing, for the Baroness had made up her mind to have two Sisters living at the château. This Julie refused point-blank, "the good God putting into her mouth what she had to say." One day while she was at Binche, two little girls, one of whom was suffering from a disease of the eyes, came to ask a remedy from the charitable châtelaine. As Mme. de Coppens was absent, the servants were sending the children away.

"What is the matter, my child?" said Julie to the little sufferer.

"My eyes are so bad."

"Come, it is nothing at all. Let us kneel down and say a prayer together." Then she traced the sign of the cross upon the sore eyes with her thumb, and the little girl rose up completely cured, and went home full of joy and gratitude. The story was related to Mère Blin de Bourdon by the daughters of the Baroness, and the miracle was attested by numerous witnesses in the juridical process.*

The same year, in the very depth of a severe winter, the indefatigable Foundress undertook a

* *Memoirs*, vol. iv, p. 69. -*Informatio*, etc., de donis et miraculis in vita, xix, § 29.

journey to Breda, by roads so bad that the horses were sometimes breast-high in water. Here again the establishment had to be refused, but the journey had nevertheless served a providential purpose. While waiting in Brussels for the coach to Namur, she felt suddenly and strongly drawn to visit the Countess de Ribaucourt (*née* Quarré) to recommend to her some poor people at Namur. This lady, who had a great affection for Julie, had just inherited the property and house which the Sisters rented in the Rue des Fossés, and which the Foundress greatly desired to purchase. Julie knew nothing of this, and was therefore much surprised on entering the Hôtel de Ribaucourt to be at once addressed on the subject of the sale of the Namur house. It had fallen to her lot, said the Countess, in the division of the property, and she and her husband wished the Sisters to have the preference over other purchasers. The Servant of God blessed Him that she had been at Brussels just at this juncture; and having ascertained all particulars about the estimate of the house, hastened off to consult Mgr. Pisani and Sister St-Joseph. Two days later, by the advice of the Bishop, both the Foundresses started for Brussels; on December 13 the purchase was concluded, and the Institute had acquired its first property. On the return of the two Mothers the whole community assembled to sing the *Te Deum*

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in thanksgiving that the Lord had provided for Himself a house where He would vouchsafe to dwell in the midst of His humble handmaids—a holy house and a beloved one, whose walls were to stretch out, and whose boundaries were to be extended as the family of Notre-Dame increased and multiplied.

The reader will remember that in the first days of 1810 the Sisters had taken possession of the Nouveau-Bois Abbey at Ghent. The beginnings of what is now one of the most flourishing and best appointed of all the educational establishments in Belgium were marked by extreme poverty. Crowded together in a small part of the Abbey buildings, excluded even from the church, which was still in the hands of the owners of the workshops, the community of the Nouveau-Bois had to suffer privations of all kinds. For the first few days they had no seats but two or three broken chairs left by the last occupants, and no beds but palliasses thrown on the floor. As to food, it would often have failed them altogether had not their Mother, so long as she remained with them, found their provisions multiplied in her hands.* She confided the care of the community to the valiant Sister Catherine Daullée, whose acquaintance we have already made, and who was replaced at St-Pierre by Sister Marie

*Testimony of Sister Marie-Alphonse de Gottal.



BOARDING SCHOOL, NOUVEAU-BOIS

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Steenhaut. Perhaps the Foundress had her fears that the new Superior's courage and mortification might get the better of her prudence, for before leaving Ghent she specially recommended her to watch over her Sisters' health, telling her she would rather close the house than expose them to the danger of becoming ill. But when, on the opening of the schools, the Sisters beheld the multitude of children who flocked in, eager for instruction, they felt they could suffer anything rather than abandon those precious souls. So the hardships of an extreme poverty were made light of, and kept, as far as possible, from the knowledge of the Servant of God. The Sisters indeed counted all these things joy. Fervour, gaiety and trust in God blossomed, as they will always blossom, under the shadow of holy poverty, and the daughters of the Blessed Julie were as happy with nothing to live upon as those of St. Teresa were at the Carmel of Toledo, dividing a sardine into three portions and cooking one egg in a borrowed saucepan. Their confidence in God, indeed, was more than once rewarded in a supernatural manner even when their Mother was absent. One day, the annals of Nouveau-Bois relate, the community sat down to table, but there was nothing to put before them save a single piece of bread barely enough for one person's breakfast. The Superior, not telling

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her Sisters that it was the last morsel in the house, had it passed round, and when they had divided it amongst them, there was still a portion left for the next meal. In the evening of the same day a sack of flour and a sum of money were brought to the door, though the donor knew nothing of the straits to which the religious were reduced. Perhaps it was with some presentiment of the rigorous poverty which for four years her children at Ghent would be called upon to practise, that the Servant of God had put their house under the special protection of that poorest of Poor Clares, St. Colette, like herself a native of Picardy, and whose name, held dear throughout all Flanders, is especially so at Ghent, where she died. She had promised the Saint, moreover, that she would give her name to the first postulant who should present herself at the Abbey. Frances Martens claimed this privilege and, as Sister Colette, kept up for many years the early traditions of the primitive Congregation, dying in her eighty-ninth year at Brussels in 1878.

In the month of May, 1810, we find Mère Julie again at Ghent, when Napoleon and Marie-Louise were making their triumphal entry into the city. The object of this visit was to obtain a provisional chapel for the Sisters at Nouveau-Bois while they were waiting to get possession of the abbey church. Hitherto they had been obliged to attend

the parish church of St. Anne, but some pious and charitable friends were occupying themselves with fitting up a chapel for them, and had begged Julie to come and overlook the arrangements.

She writes word to Namur that the priests of the episcopal palace are furnishing the altar, and the Superior of the Seminary is undertaking the expenses of the painting. As for the schools, they are crowded with children, and the lace-making class is flourishing also. The good Curé of St. Anne and the Curé of the Lesser Béguinage are both much interested in the work of the Sisters; the latter is helping them to clothe their poor children. She herself has been to buy stuff to make them all a little uniform, for they have absolutely nothing to put on. All this means a great deal of work, but it is for the good God; He will turn it to His own greater glory and their sanctification. God is raining down alms for these poor children—nearly fifty crowns since Julie has been in Ghent!

Their dirt and ignorance are beyond conception; there are some who made their first Communion two years ago, and now cannot even tell you that there is a God! They say no prayers, and know nothing, nothing at all. "My God, how good Thou art to have sent us to help these poor little ones!" Then she speaks of all she has had to do for the Sisters in their poverty. They would

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hardly believe at Namur how much she has been obliged to spend on absolute necessities—plates and cups and spoons: there were only six spoons when she came, and the Sisters had to wait for each other in eating their soup. But they are so gay over it all! and it is such a happiness to be without something!

She thinks the good God must shower down money upon her, for now, after paying for all her purchases, she still finds some in her purse. Blessed be His Holy Name! He will, if He so please, continue to help them like a kind Father. She gives the Sisters of Namur other bits of news—what great preparations are being made in the town for the coming of the Emperor, how she had had the honour of dining with the Bishop, and, best of all, how she is expecting good Father Thomas, with whom she will travel back to the Mother-House. Her old friend did, in fact, return with Julie to Namur. All welcomed him as a father, but most of all those with whom he had lived so long at the Rue Neuve, and who had not seen him for now five years; and, chiefest among these, Mère Blin de Bourdon, whose soul he had directed and trained during double that period. He stayed with them twelve days, and left with the promise that he would come back in September to give the general Retreat.

The dinner with the Bishop alluded to in the

above letter had been sorely against the will of the humble Servant of God. She had been to Holy Communion in the Church of St-Bavon one Sunday, and then, after long walking up and down the city in the interests of Nouveau-Bois and its chapel, had gone to call on the Bishop's Secretary to consult him on matters connected with the business. It was midday, and M. Van Schouwenberghe asked her to have some dinner: on her refusal he inquired at what hour she had breakfasted, and Julie was forced to acknowledge that she was still fasting, whereupon the Secretary obliged her by obedience to dine at his Lordship's table in company with several distinguished guests/

Julie had made up her mind that the first Mass at Nouveau-Bois should be said on the feast of St. Peter's Chains, August 1, 1810. The chapel was indeed ready, but absolutely everything necessary for the Holy Sacrifice was wanting. On the eve, M. Van Schouwenberghe, who was to be the celebrant on the morrow, asked her if she had all that was needed. "I have nothing," she replied, "neither chalice, nor missal, nor vestments; but God's Providence will supply all." So it was; one friend lent and another gave, and when morning dawned everything had been provided.

At the Convent of St-Pierre, Sister Marie Steenhaut directed the schools in so wise and

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kind a manner that she conciliated the esteem of every one, clergy, parents and benefactors. The Curé, seeing the effects of the Sisters' influence on the young girls who frequented their schools and workrooms, determined in his zeal to go a step further, and to put under their protection a class of girls who were specially exposed, and, indeed, partially corrupted. He begged the Superior to admit some of these neophytes, as he called them, as boarders in an unoccupied part of the house. About a dozen were received, and Sister Ursula was entrusted with the difficult task of superintending them. She devoted herself heart and soul to the work, but the results were not satisfactory; the neophytes did not appreciate the efforts made to reclaim them. One day, after vainly searching for one of these unfortunate creatures, who had absented herself from the general recreation, Sister Ursula discovered her in a tiny attic preparing to hang herself! The horrified Sister was just in time to cut the cord and save the girl's life. In a number of cases disease had made as much havoc in their bodies as sin in their souls, and after a two years' trial, the work had to be given up. The Servant of God had only permitted the experiment in deference to the wishes of the good Curé; she was satisfied, after the attempt had been made, that God did not ask this sort of work from the Institute, and that it

was likely to injure its chief end, the training of youth in the paths of virtue, and the creation of houses of education where children might grow up in all innocence and safety.

In 1812, the house at St-Pierre was finally suppressed, the community joining that of Nouveau-Bois. The excellent Curé, though feeling keenly the failure of his cherished project, received the blow with edifying resignation, and to the last kept his esteem for Mère Julie and his interest in her daughters.

During these first years of poverty and trial at Nouveau-Bois, the visits of the Servant of God were frequent. Late one night Sister Marie heard the door-bell ring, and on looking out was surprised to see a cart containing a party of six—Mère Julie and five postulants, whom she was taking back from Picardy. At once the Sisters were awakened and there was a holy strife amongst them as to who should contribute most from her own bed in the way of blankets and mattresses to accommodate the travellers. But they were somewhat taken aback when their Mother's all-embracing compassion insisted that driver and horse should likewise be lodged. Sister Marie's respectful remonstrances were met with a cheery, "Make no fuss about it, my daughter. Have confidence; we shall find all we need," and then Julie proceeded to the Poor School,

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pushed all the benches back against the wall, and made the Sisters improvise a bed on the floor for the good man, who, in his turn, settled his horse in a corner of the same room. But the poor beast had travelled far, and now there was no hay for it, which distressed both its master and Julie almost equally. So Sister Marie and a postulant sallied forth gaily on a moonlight expedition for fodder from a neighbouring farm; but nobody would sell at so late an hour, and the horse was finally regaled from the scanty provision of the Sisters' own bread.

Another evening the Superior-General arrived to find all the Sisters busy at the wash. She at once went to the tub with the rest, saying that the good God was very good to have sent her just in time to help them in work which was too heavy for them. The scrubbing went on merrily, and when six o'clock struck—the hour for the evening instruction in Christian Doctrine—the Servant of God said, "My children, we will wash and learn at the same time." And thereupon she began to speak out of the abundance of her heart on her good God, so that all the Sisters stopped their work to listen; even the Flemings, who did not understand a word, felt their hearts burn within them as they gazed at her kindling eyes and shining countenance, for her whole person, says the narrator, who was an eye-witness of the scene,



THE CLOISTERS, NOUVEAU-BOIS

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was a reflection of God. The washing, however, did not make much progress thus; and when at seven o'clock the angelus rang, the work was not half finished. Mère Julie smiled her sweet smile. "Come," she said, "it is meditation hour; let us go to the good God, and listen to the whispers of His Holy Spirit. To-morrow we will get up earlier to catch up the time I have made you lose." No one else, indeed, counted the time lost; but all thanked God for an interruption which had brought them so much grace. Next morning Mother and daughters rose at three to finish the wash.

In the summer vacation of 1810 Père Bruson gave the annual retreat at Nouveau-Bois to the two communities of Ghent. A somewhat characteristic anecdote of the good Jesuit has been preserved in connection with it. Sister Marie Steenhaut, Superior of the St-Pierre house, was one day unavoidably detained after the bell had rung, and arrived late for the afternoon Conference. "Sister," called out Père Bruson, "here you come, distracting everybody." The humble religious immediately went down upon her knees, and as the Father did not tell her to rise, remained in that posture during the entire exercise. In the same year Père Thomas redeemed his promise at the Mother-House, giving the spiritual exercises to the communities of Namur, Jumet and St-

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Hubert, gathered together there for the retreat of which we have spoken in a former chapter. On the day of its close, the Maison-Mère was *en fête*; fifteen Sisters pronounced their vows at the hands of Mère Julie and in presence of M. Minsart as the Bishop's delegate. Julie herself kept up the sacred fire enkindled in that memorable retreat by him to whom the Institute owed so much. In her wise instructions to the Namur community, in her private counsels, in her letters to the Superiors and Sisters of the secondary houses, burst forth with an irresistible *élan* that double flame which consumed her own heart—love of God, love of souls. Yes! those little souls created to the image of God, redeemed with the Blood of Jesus Christ, how truly, how tenderly, but how supernaturally Mère Julie loved them! And how she breathed that same love into the breasts of her daughters! Such an affection almost infallibly awakens love in those who are its objects;—everywhere the pupils of the Sisters of Notre-Dame became warmly and sincerely attached to their new mistresses, a tradition which, thanks be to God, has been preserved to our own day. And Julie rejoiced that it was so; only, she reminds them not to keep the little hearts for themselves. “Turn the tender attachment of your little girls to the greater glory of God,” she writes. And again: “Let our only thought be to win souls

to our blessed Jesus." Still less was their affection for the children to degenerate into weakness; they are to mingle their gentleness with firmness, so as to ensure respect and maintain authority.

We may fitly insert here some passages from Mère St-Joseph's *Memoirs* which, treating of the Ghent foundation, admit us to a more intimate knowledge of the spirit which animated the Servant of God in all that she undertook during these last busy years.

"Divine Providence," she writes, "blessed our Mother's government because she sought only the glory of God. She used to say to those who shared her confidence, that she saw so many palpable effects of God's loving conduct in her regard, that she could no longer disquiet herself about anything; that her one care and solicitude was to know and accomplish the will of God. This was apparent, for she undertook good works boldly and promptly without much troubling about the means of carrying them out. God, when the moment came, gave His blessing to these enterprises, which of course in principle were not imprudent. Neither the darkness nor the difficulty of the way could stop her; it was enough for her to know the goal towards which God wished her to walk. Her habit was to go on blindly, keeping her soul united to God, not seeking to calculate

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events beforehand, but waiting for, and following, the indications of Providence. She used often to say that all places were the same to her. She gave herself up entirely to the duty of the moment wherever she might be; as soon as it was done she went away. In fact, she considered that a prolonged stay of the Superior-General might be prejudicial to a secondary house. From the time of her miraculous cure, her life may be said to have been a perpetual journey. All the while she was frequently ill and without appetite, sometimes passing whole months scarcely eating at all. Yet she never gave up her work or her correspondence. If there was a foundation to be made or a journey to be taken in the interests of God's glory or the well-being of her daughters, it was useless to urge considerations of health to induce her to defer it. Her strength, moreover, was not natural; God seemed to give her fresh supplies as she needed it."

Sister Reine Cambier adds: "When our Mère Julie had founded a house, after initiating each Sister in her functions, she left them, leaving them, so to say, no other resource than the Providence of God. To the Superior of St-Hubert she gave one franc, to the Superior of Zèle five, telling them to be very economical and then to reckon on the good God."

Mère St. Joseph gives us some particulars of the manner in which the Servant of God was accustomed to travel.

"She avoided, as far as she could, entering inns; while the horses were being changed, she took a walk. She generally carried her own little provisions and ate alone in a corner of the garden. Sometimes, indeed, she was obliged to appear at the *table-d'hôte*, for she knew how to make herself, according to circumstances, all to all. But what she suffered at times both there and in the *diligences*, from the blasphemies and bad language she was forced to hear, is unspeakable. To know that her God was being so lightly, so repeatedly outraged by His creatures, was torture for a heart that loved and felt as hers did. Often and often have I heard her say that she could not understand why she did not die of grief on these occasions; and it is a fact that she had to make violent efforts over herself to keep from bursting into tears. Sometimes she found an opportunity of expressing her disapproval in words whose zeal was tempered by prudence, and of stopping, for a time at least, the flow of profane language."*

These frequent journeys were no distraction to the Servant of God; she breathed another atmosphere, and the dwelling-place of her soul was in

* *Memoirs*, Vol. II, p. 225.

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peace. "One beautiful spring day," relates her friend, "on our return from two journeys which we had made together, I said to her: 'It is a pity, ma Mère, but when I have been travelling my imagination is filled for two days with trees, roads, men and women; are you like that, ma Mère?' She answered: 'I never think of them; the moment I am back, everything is effaced from my mind. I have no imagination now.' On the other hand, the most ordinary occurrences served to lift her thoughts above the earth. When, after the retreat of 1810, she had taken her Sisters back to St-Hubert, she made the long and difficult return journey on foot. On the way she met two good soldiers going to join their regiment at Namur. She found them so courteous and so obliging in accommodating their steps to hers—when they thought of it, be it understood—that she chose to follow them rather than to be by herself on that lonely road. It was a warm September day, and Mère Julie with her woollen habit, her cloak rolled under her arm, and her travelling bag, had hard work to keep up with her military companions. One had just been named sergeant and the other captain; they were much elated by their promotion and full of enthusiasm for their profession. Julie listened to the warlike ardour of their conversation and to their glowing expressions of loyalty, and gave silent

thanks to the King who had enrolled her in a more glorious warfare. 'I would give the last drop of my blood for my emperor,' said the young officer. 'And I,' whispered the Servant of God, 'shall I not give to my God whatever He asks of me? Oh! yes, yes, my blood, my heart, my life, my whole being!' She used to tell her daughters afterwards that the martial talk of these brave soldiers had caused her to make many acts of the love of God, and had wonderfully helped her to bear the fatigue of this long forced march. She reached Namur at nine o'clock in the evening in a state of complete exhaustion, having taken nothing during the long march of more than twenty-four miles but an egg and a piece of bread. A very restless night made the Sisters fear she had done herself harm, but the next morning she resumed her ordinary occupations." This was the single occasion in the whole course of her religious life when Julie prolonged her sleep one hour beyond that of the Community. "You have been uneasy," she wrote to the Superior of St-Hubert, "about my journey. The good God took pity on me; I was very tired, but that was all. You know very well that I do not belong to myself, but to God and to His work."

At the beginning of the year 1811 Mgr. de Broglie proposed to Mère Julie a foundation at Audenaerde, distant about fifteen miles from

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Ghent. He offered her there an old monastery, which during the Revolution had been turned into a Freemasons' Lodge. The Foundress went to look at it with M. Van Schouwenberghe and Sister Marie Steenhaut. They were shown the subterranean cave which the late occupants had hollowed out in the garden, their dark meeting-places whose walls were painted with mysterious and dreadful symbols. Glad indeed would the Blessed Mother have been to restore the desecrated house to its former destination; but there were difficulties in the way which made her doubt God's will in the matter; and, in fact, when, committing the decision to the sure guidance of obedience, she laid the reasons for and against before the Bishop, Mgr. de Broglie changed his mind and told her to give up all thought of the foundation. The event proved the guidance of divine Providence. Only a month later the Prince-Bishop was summoned with the other prelates of the Empire to that National Council of Paris by which Napoleon attempted to replace the authority of the Supreme Pontiff. Though the youngest of the assembled Bishops, Mgr. de Broglie distinguished himself among them all by his episcopal firmness and his attachment to the Holy See, and won for himself in consequence the honours of imprisonment and exile. On the night of July 11, 1811, he was dragged from his bed and

thrown into the dungeon of Vincennes, where he passed four months in the most rigorous detention. He was then, by the Emperor's orders, exiled first to Beaune, and later, on pretext that he was keeping up a correspondence with his clergy, to the Island of Ste-Marguerite, near Hyères. Mère Julie never saw her noble protector again. No sooner had she heard of his arrest, than "she ordered," say the manuscript annals of the Institute, "prayers and penances for him and his persecuted clergy in all her convents. Later on, she bade us continue these practices whenever the like necessities should arise. In times of public calamity she wished the whole Institute to offer continual supplications to God, to turn aside His anger and draw down His mercies. But when misfortune attacked the Church directly, her zeal knew no bounds: night and day she was to be seen prostrate before the tabernacle, offering herself to God as a victim of expiation for the sins of His people." In the March of 1814 Mgr. de Broglie was able to return to his diocese, where he continued to show the same paternal affection to the Sisters of Notre-Dame, often visiting them and presiding at the religious and literary exercises of their pupils. But he was not long left in peace. In 1815 he lifted up his voice against the new constitutional oath, and in the following year against the projects of William of Orange, King

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of the Netherlands, for the organization of public instruction. Cited before the tribunal at Brussels, the great prelate was once again condemned to banishment, and his sentence, written in large letters, fastened to the pillory between two criminals in the great square of Ghent.

“It has pleased our Lord,” wrote the confessor of the Faith to the Sisters of Notre-Dame from the place of his exile, “to associate me with one of His ignominies by allowing my sentence to be posted up by the hand of the public executioner between two thieves. I felt a holy pride in this, and a great Christian joy. Believe that you are all dear to me in Jesus Christ. I recommend myself to your prayers, and I do not forget you in mine.”

Père Leblanc, of the Society of Jesus, his friend and confidant, alone accompanied the persecuted Bishop into France. Mgr. de Broglie died at Paris on July 20, 1821. We have anticipated events in order not to interrupt the course of our narrative. The exile of their friend and protector was a serious loss to the Sisters of Nouveau-Bois. The number of their pupils diminished, and the resources of the fervent community were often at a very low ebb. Sister Catherine be-thought herself of a means of increasing them which led to a memorable act on the part of her

Superior-General. There was at the Abbey a spacious courtyard in which, as they had no garden, the Sisters and children were accustomed to spend their recreation-hour. Now this courtyard was paved with round stones, and it occurred to Sister Catherine that it would be a great gain to remove these and transform the court into a potato-field. The Sisters forthwith set to work—unpaved the court, dug up the earth, planted the potatoes. Unfortunately for the success of the scheme, the Superior had forgotten to ask the permission of Mère Julie. When next the Foundress visited Ghent, she was astonished to find the pavement gone and the first green leaves of the young potatoes sprouting. "What have you done, Sister Catherine?" she exclaimed. "I know you are poor, but are you no longer going to reckon on God's providence? Must the good Sisters be deprived of air and space when already their food is insufficient? Come, we must undo all this. Send for your little pupils; give them an hour's extra play and let them jump and dance on this ill-advised field of yours; the Sisters can then replace the paving-stones." No sooner said than done. The nimble little feet trampled down the crop, the Sisters re-paved the court, and the potatoes were forgotten. One day, late in the autumn, as the community were taking their recreation in the courtyard, one of their number

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perceived some green leaves struggling through the stones. On removing these she found a fine plant with a number of large potatoes. More stones were lifted with the same result. But before touching them the Superior asked Mère Julie what should be done. The Servant of God replied that since the potatoes were there, they might take up all they found; and the harvest thus gathered from the paved field served the Sisters the whole winter through. God had thus marvelously blessed their prompt obedience.

We may insert here an extract from the *Souvenirs* of Sister Reine Cambier. "I was at school at the Nouveau-Bois," she writes, "when Mère Julie came to make her visitation. I shall never forget the impression she made upon me; that countenance with its heavenly smile, that winning manner, that expression of holiness. She gained all our hearts in the very first interview. I was a giddy, mischievous girl; Sister Marie Steenhaut, Superior at the time, presented me to our Mother, who urged me always to love the good God very much because He is so good. I was charmed with this little mark of attention from our holy Fountress. I could not take my eyes off her; she seemed to be in our midst like Our Lord Himself. Next day during Mass I kept gazing at Mère Julie; I was so touched, so edified, that I said to my mistresses: 'Now I know how the saints

pray.' I felt so great a love for the holy Mother-General that I promised our Lady to make a novena in thanksgiving if she would obtain me the privilege of speaking to her again. In the course of the morning, I made some pretext for leaving class in the hope of meeting Mère Julie; hardly had I taken a few steps in the cloisters than she appeared, and I ran up and cast myself at her feet. She laid her hand in blessing on my head and then she said: 'Oh! my little girl (I was very small in spite of my fifteen years), you will be a Sister of Notre-Dame one day.' I was amazed, for I felt an unconquerable disgust for the religious life; I loved pleasure, and when I saw my mistresses so poor, so mortified, sometimes in such ill health, I had more than once said to myself: 'If the whole world were to be turned upside down, I could never make up my mind to enter the convent.' I cannot express what I felt within me when Mère Julie thus foretold my vocation to me."

Many another vocation blossomed forth at the passage of the Blessed Mother. Sister Basil used to tell the story that once, as quite a little child, she met Julie in the streets of Ath. Arrested by her costume, she stopped to look at her, when, to her surprise, the stranger approached, and laying her hand upon her shoulder, said: "Where are you going, my child?" "I am going to the

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chemist to buy some medicine for my mother, who is very ill." "Is your mother ill, poor little thing? I will pray for her. Take great care of her, dear little one; pray much to the good God, love Him very much, and you will one day be my daughter." The child kept these words in her heart, and years after, when God's call came to her in all its strength, her confessor directed her to the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Namur. On entering the parlour, she found herself face to face with the portrait of her who had once said to her, "you shall be my daughter." Rapt in wonder and delight, she stood gazing at it, and did not perceive the entrance of Mère St-Joseph, then General. The latter, when she heard the story, said: "Oh, welcome! Since Mère Julie foretold your vocation to you, it is a solid one."

Towards the end of the year 1810 a fresh foundation was asked for by the administrators of the diocese of Ghent; it was for Zèle, a populous country town in East Flanders. The Curé offered the Sisters a free house standing in a large garden, and himself undertook all the initial expenses. The exiled Bishop had proposed the place to Mère Julie just before he was taken from his flock, and she wrote from Ghent to ask her Sisters at Namur to offer up their next Communion that "all might be for the greater glory of God." She was quite charmed, as she had been at St-



CONVENT OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME AND CHAPEL
OF THE SEVEN DOLOURS AT ZÈLE

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Hubert, with the patriarchal character of pastor and people, their old-fashioned ways and simple piety. A celebrated chapel of Our Lady of Dolours lent an additional interest to the place. A chronogram over its façade states that it dates back to the middle of the sixteenth century. It contains, besides a lofty marble altar, a fine figure of the dead Christ, and is still a favourite place of pilgrimage for the surrounding villages, while the stations of Maria Desolata, placed just outside and around the Sisters' grounds, are constantly visited by the devout and believing population. "Our Mother," says the author of the *Memoirs*, playing upon the name of the town, "came back to us *tout embaumée de Zèle*, and tried, as is her wont, to inflame us with her own fire."* The mistresses for the schools were chosen from among the Flemish Sisters, as that language was then the only one spoken at Zèle, and Sister Jeanne Godelle, mistress of novices at Namur, was appointed Superior.

As for the domestic offices, Mère Julie had no one at her disposal, so it was regulated that the mistresses should give whatever leisure time they had morning and evening to manual labour, and that the Superior herself should undertake the kitchen. The delight of the good Curé at the arrival of the Sisters was shared by all the in-

* *Memoirs*, Vol. III, p. 146.

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habitants, who took it into their heads to testify their joy by firing off salvos of artillery with some old pieces of cannon which belonged to the town. In the midst of these noisy, and to them alarming, demonstrations, the Sisters entered their new convent. While the Foundress received the civic authorities, and the future mistresses welcomed the little ones whom their mothers hastened to offer as pupils, Sister Jeanne began her experiments in the kitchen. They do not seem to have been very successful, for Julie writes: "Sister Jeanne treated us on the first day to red cabbage and potatoes, burnt nearly dry for want of water. She told us it had all disappeared in the saucepan! Next day I tried my hand; but things did not go much better, because, you see, the burnt potatoes of yesterday tasted much the same one day as another. But it was good to see Sister Jeanne's confidence in her *début* as cook. 'Ah! ma Mère,' she kept saying gaily, 'it will be all right.'" * The Sisters were soon at home with the good simple people of Zèle; and the Foundress, at her departure, felt that she left there a religious family which would spread the good odour of Jesus Christ. The schools gave every promise of success; a *pensionnat* was before long opened, and work-rooms for teaching lace-making.

Several other foundations were offered about

* Letter to Mère Blin, dated November 19, 1811,



BOARDING SCHOOL OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME, JUMET

the same time to the Servant of God, but her zeal was too enlightened to be over-eager, and she declined them until her subjects were more thoroughly formed. "We should lose much," she would often say, "by going on too fast."

Shortly after her return to Namur the Blessed Mother again fell ill from excess of fatigue, and it was some time before she regained her health. She profited by this forced repose to give herself to the religious formation of the younger Sisters at the Mother-House. For, as one of her biographers has well said, she was the heart of her Congregation as well as its head, and her example was its living Rule. It was strong food with which she nourished her daughters. Mère St-Joseph tells us that the ordinary subjects of her instructions were the necessity of leading an interior life, of breaking self-will at the foot of the cross, of making meditation a means of conquering the passions, of thorough mortification and abnegation in order to arrive at union with God.

After Namur, the house at Jumet was at that time the most flourishing of the foundations made by the Servant of God. Sister Anastasie Leleu directed the *pensionnat* with so much skill and success that its reputation stood very high, and even from great distances families would send their daughters to Jumet, for the sake of the solid

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and practical education given to the pupils there.* The numbers increased so much that additions to the buildings were required, and in 1810 and 1811 Mère Julie made several visits to Jumièges to take measures for improving the accommodation. But a cross soon came to Jumièges, heavy alike to its Superior and to Mère Julie herself. Among the orphans who had been received at Amiens when Mère Julie and de Bourdon had first opened their house in the Rue Neuve was a little girl of twelve years, named Madeleine Firmine N——. She entered the orphanage in that memorable February of 1802, when the two Foundresses obliged themselves by vow to devote their lives to the Christian education of youth. While Mère Julie occupied herself with exterior works of zeal, Mère Élis de Bourdon took charge of the inmates of the house, and it was she who prepared Firmine for her first Communion. The letters of Julie from Abbeville and St-Valéry are full of loving messages to her "dear little girls, to her dear Firmine and all her little companions who desire with all their hearts to love our good Jesus." This favoured child, who had witnessed Mère Julie's miraculous

* The prosperity of the Convent at Jumièges has lasted to our own day. Amongst the papers preserved there may be mentioned the Reverend Mother Auguste Wilson, sixth Superior-General of the Institute, universally beloved, and deeply regretted at her death, which took place in June, 1888. Another of the Jumièges pupils was Marie de Contesse, a perfect type of Christian womanhood in the world, who died at the Castle of Flandre in 1895.

cure, and many of her supernatural graces, and who had seen the marvellous fruits of her instructions, soon became deeply attached to her kind benefactress. No one had so much power as Mère Julie to restrain the sallies of that ardent and impetuous nature. The young girl grew up to be very attractive both in mind and person, while her intercourse with Mère de Bourdon had given her unusual cultivation and distinction of manner. The holy Foundress was not without anxiety about Firmine's future, and she profited by every opportunity to inspire her with distrust of the world and love of virtue. Firmine knew that no one loved her as her adopted mothers did, she was sincerely inclined to piety, she enjoyed teaching, she believed herself called to religion, and entreated Mère Julie to receive her. She was admitted as a postulant when she had completed her seventeenth year, but her religious life was marked by a certain unsteadiness of purpose, and by fits and starts of fervour. She was unfortunate in being one of the community under Mère Victoire; it became desirable to remove her from Amiens, and when Mère Julie left for Belgium she obtained permission to take Firmine with her. She was sent to Jumet, where she taught the pupils of the boarding-school with great success, and captivated them by her talents and her manners. The praises bestowed upon her by parents

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and children turned her head ; a thoroughly worldly spirit gradually took possession of her till nothing of the religious remained to her but the habit and the name ; and Mère Julie, after repeated attempts to reclaim this cherished child, was obliged sorrowfully to acknowledge that her case was past cure. The Sister herself took the initiative ; she wrote to a brother of hers who filled some post at the court of Jerome Napoleon in Westphalia, representing her unhappiness and asking him to send for her. The secret correspondence for some time kept up with him was finally discovered by Sister Anastasie, and Julie made a last effort to keep the erring sheep in the fold, but to no avail. Then the Servant of God prudently resolved to avoid the publicity which the arrival of Mr. N—— would give to the affair by sending Firmine in the charge of a confidential person to the lady at Amiens who had first put her under the care of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. It is hardly necessary to add that the world she so loved played her false when she had returned to it. For years she suffered the privations of extreme poverty, but the Servant of God followed her unceasingly with her prayers, and to them, and to her early religious training at Notre-Dame, she seems to have owed the grace of preserving her virtue in the midst of grave perils, and of contracting in the end a Christian marriage.

The blow had been a singularly painful one to Julie's heart. She writes on June 5, 1811, to Sister Leleu:

"My dear Daughter— You have made me anxious; receiving no news of you I began to fear that the shock we have suffered had made you ill. For myself, I cannot get over it, not on account of the loss of a valuable subject, but because of the dangers I foresee for her soul. With regard to ourselves, I believe her departure to be an adorable stroke of Divine Providence. We should perhaps not have had the courage to dismiss her,—I, because after all she has told me I feared for her soul, you, because you thought no one could replace her with the pupils. Let us acknowledge before our good God that He stands in need of no one to do His work; I have thought over this in my mind more than once. O depth of the judgments of God! one is taken, another is left! Take care of yourself, my daughter, for God's greater glory; not that I think, any more than you do, that the good God has greater need of us than of the others. Oh! no, no, my God! we confess it with all our hearts in Thy holy presence.

* * * * *

"Let us pray God not to abandon her. My God! to have been so long inundated with graces, and to have been so unfaithful! neither I nor

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Sister St-Joseph can understand it. One must have seen her, as you and I have done, to realize how far she had gone astray."

The example of Firmine had not been without some influence over the young Sisters who had been associated with her. Julie exhorts the Superior to tighten the bands of religious discipline and to send away a novice with a doubtful vocation. Her words are worth quoting:

"In what concerns the schools I beg of you to let everything be submitted to you; have nothing introduced, nothing dropped, without your sanction. Even in secular matters the good God loves this spirit of dependence; how much more in a religious house. Let us show compassion and mercy, but no weakness, or we shall spoil all. When charity is courageous and firm it does no harm, because this sort of charity comes from God, Who is both its principle and its end. I hope, please God, that all will go well in your house, but you must not delay getting rid of Sister E. (the novice). I believe that person's stay with you is not according to the will of God. We must not be so indulgent, my daughter; we might have to pay dearly for it before God. Heli, the high priest, was indulgent, and what a punishment did he not draw down upon himself from the hand of God!"

A few days later she announces to the Sisters at Jumet that she will pay them a visit to console them after the trouble they have gone through. "I must go and see you," she writes gaily, "before your cherries are all eaten, and I shall try and bring Sister St-Joseph with me." The two Mothers spent, in fact, a few days with the Jumet Community, where they were consoled to find that, while the prosperity of the *pensionnat* had lost nothing by Firmine's departure, religious spirit had been the gainer. But the penetrating glance of the Servant of God saw that there were still tares among the wheat. Two religious, by name Sister Martha and Sister Frances, whose characters had already given trouble in other houses, had been sent to Jumet in the hope that the wise and kind government of Sister Leleu might reform the insubordination of the one and the passionate and uncontrolled temper of the other. When, at the time of the long vacation, two successive retreats were organized at the Mother-House, the Foundress summoned Sister Frances to the first and Sister Martha to the second, trusting that in those days of more abundant and special grace the indocility of their hearts might be overcome. For some reason or other Sister Martha was annoyed at not having been included in the first party, and wrote off a murmuring and disrespectful letter to her Superior-General, for

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whom her affection, though warm, was purely natural. Julie lost no time. Having taken the advice of her Council, she set off for Jumet at five o'clock in the morning, had an interview with the confessor, who approved of the expulsion, and in the afternoon herself took back Martha to her family in France. The long journey of some two hundred miles was accomplished, so to say, without taking breath, and is adduced by Mère St-Joseph as a proof of the fortitude of the Blessed Mother. Later on, several members of the French clergy used their utmost efforts with the Bishop of Namur to obtain the re-admission of Mlle. L——into the Institute; but, where the fundamental principles of religious life were concerned, the Foundress showed herself inflexible, and Mgr. Pisani fully approved her reasons. Sister Frances also, unable to resign herself to the change of house and occupation imposed upon her by obedience after the retreat, left the Congregation a little later, and two novices were dismissed about the same time. One of these last, who belonged to a noble family in Hainault, lived for many years after the death of the Servant of God, *of whom*, say the Acts of the juridical process, *she always spoke as a Saint*. "From time to time," says Mère St-Joseph in detailing these dismissals, "the Lord takes His fan in hand and winnows the wheat from the chaff, which is no small grace."



“LE BON DIEU DE GEMBOUX”

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In the year 1813 we find the municipality of Gembloux applying for a foundation. It had a rapid extension, and in the following year the Sisters removed into the old Benedictine Abbey, founded in the tenth century by St. Guibert, lord of the district, and secularized at the Revolution. The Abbey Church contained a very ancient statue, popularly known as *le bon Dieu de Gembloux*, before which Julie, in her visits to Gembloux, loved to kneel; it represented Our Lord in His Scourging, and on March 8, 1553, a large quantity of blood had miraculously flowed from it. This house had for its Superior the saintly Sister Gertrude—that little Ciska Steenhaut who had clung to “her mother” with such unshaken attachment at Amiens. Hers was no ordinary soul—simple and mortified, so recollected that she seemed hardly ever to lose the presence of God. She was favoured with extraordinary graces and even ecstasies in prayer, and at the same time was of so sweet, amiable and joyous a disposition that she endeared herself to all who knew her. She had asked Our Lord to let her pass as many years in religion as she had lived in the world, and, in fact, having entered the Institute at fifteen, she died at thirty. Another of her prayers, to have her purgatory in this life, would seem also to have been granted, for she underwent terrible tortures. But they never ruffled the peace of her

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soul, nor shook her childlike trust in God. She died at Gembloux on May 18, 1821, and on the day of her funeral the good inhabitants, in their naive gratitude, fastened on to the catafalque the touching inscription: "Gertrude, nous te regrettons." Her remains lie in the Abbey grounds in the old cemetery of the monks. During the Processes of 1882 and 1890, a venerable octogenarian presented herself to give evidence before the tribunal—Mme. de Bernard de Fauconval, *née* du Ry. She had been educated at Gembloux, and her recollections of the Foundress were mingled with charming reminiscences of her school days under Sister Gertrude. "Often," she said, "you might see the Abbey walls covered with the inscription: *Vive Julie! Vive Gertrude!* A deep piety, and an exquisite politeness, reigned among the pupils, who were strictly forbidden to *tutoyer*, and addressed each other with quaint courtesy as *Mademoiselle*. For the slightest want of consideration the most humble excuses were made. The fare was frugal, but we were healthy, and every one was happy. The children met together morning and evening in the oratory, which we called 'Saint Benedict's'; praying like little saints in imitation of their holy mistresses, and singing with them 'cantiques' as the Angels in heaven might have sung." The old Abbey, thus twice sanctified, had, unfortunately, to be given up by



GEMBLoux: OLD BENEDICTINE ABBEY

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ANDERSON: THE FIRST HOUSE OF THE SISTERS

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the Sisters in 1860, as the premises were claimed by the State. It is now a School of Agriculture, and the Community occupy a house built by themselves.

We have already had occasion to mention the foundation at Andenne; it followed close upon that of Gembloux. The interesting little town is full of memorials of St. Begga, daughter of Blessed Pepin of Landen and sister of St. Gertrude of Nivelles. In her early widowhood, St. Begga went on a pilgrimage to Rome, and on her return erected a monastery and seven chapels in memory of the seven great Basilicas, and so to this day the town bears the name of *Andenne-aux-sept-églises*. Encouraged by the Bishop of Namur, by the Abbé Kinet, Vicar of Andenne, and by Père Leblanc, then concealed in the Presbytery there,* the Servant of God undertook to open a large school and to give Sisters to teach it. She was cordially welcomed by the Mayor, Baron de Loen, and was materially assisted in the good work by the liberality of Baron de Wal, Commander of the Teutonic Order. Struck by the success with which the Sisters managed and taught the little girls, the authorities wanted them to take charge of the boys also, but this the Foundress persistently refused; only allowing the Sisters to teach them their religion and pre-

* See above, Chap. XV.

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pare them for their First Communion. The days of the Kindergartens had not yet come, or Mère Julie would willingly have entrusted to the care of her daughters the tiny little fellows of whom, later on, they took charge.

In the spring of 1814 Mère Julie conducted a band of six Sisters to Fleurus. They at once opened a *pensionnat* and an upper-class day school, but their space was too limited to receive poor children. This was a sensible affliction to Mère Julie. "Our Foundress," says Mère Blin, "could not endure to see the poor excluded. . . . 'We ought to have the poor wherever we go,' she said, 'it is they who are the foundation-stone of our edifice.' And so in two months' time, by dint of inquiries and exertions, she found a larger house at Fleurus; she did not consider the price asked for it—which was proportionately high—but secured it without delay in sole view of admitting henceforward her dear poor." She wrote on this occasion: "Our Poor Schools ought to be the first and most important portion of our flock. We can have establishments without boarding schools, but we can have none without free Poor Schools."

Between January and June, 1815, the Servant of God undertook no less than nine journeys in the interests of her congregation. Four new foundations were proposed to her; she was only able



FLEURUS: CHATEAU DE ZUALART, WHERE BLESSED JULIE AND MÈRE ST-JOSEPH ONCE STAYED



LIEGE

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to accept two of them. Liège, the city of St. Lambert, the city which was the first to celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, had applied in 1810 for Mère Julie's Sisters, and she had gone herself to see the Abbé Neujean, Curé of the parish of St-Nicolas. For the moment nothing could be settled for want of subjects, but the Abbé promised to seek for postulants, and asked how soon he might hope to have the Sisters of Notre-Dame in his parish. "Monsieur le Curé," answered the Servant of God, "make the Sacred Heart loved, and you shall have Sisters." The words made an impression on the good priest; he preached devotion to the Sacred Heart, founded a confraternity, which in July, 1814, he affiliated to the Arch-Confraternity in Rome, and won to the Heart of Jesus Christ a number of fervent and devout disciples. Then he claimed from Julie the fulfilment of her promise, and early in 1815 she went to Liège to choose a house for the foundation. She was offered an ancient convent of Recollectines, but so much out of repair and of so sombre an aspect that it was quite unfit for school purposes. No other premises could be found at the time, and the Foundress determined to wait a little longer. But the wars of that memorable year, and then her own illness, prevented her from ever returning to Liège, and the Sisters were not established there till a few months after her death. A little

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incident is attached to this journey of the Servant of God, which was related at the Process of Information by Sister Théodore, in the world Marie Josepha Paulus, who entered the Institute in 1817 and died at Gembloux in 1887. We give it in the words of the venerable witness herself.

“I saw Reverend Mère Julie once at Liège at the house of M. Neujean, Curé of the Church of St-Nicolas. I was then about fourteen or fifteen years old. Being the daughter of the sacristan of the parish, I was present when the Foundress arrived, and it was I who opened the door to her. As soon as she entered the Curé exclaimed: ‘Oh! how happy I am to see you!’ He had previously applied for Sisters, and Mère Julie had promised them on condition that he should establish the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.... Mère Julie looked at me as she entered, and then said to the Curé, ‘That child will be one of ours.’”

Many years later, in 1834, a niece of this same holy priest entered the Institute of Notre-Dame. She had inherited her uncle's zeal for the salvation of souls, and in 1843 was one of the heroic band of Sisters who, after receiving at Brussels the blessing of Mgr. Pecci, the Papal Nuncio (later Pope Leo XIII.), set off to Wailamette in the Rocky Mountains of America to

found a house among the savage tribes there. Sister Marie Cornélie died Superior of San José, the central Convent of California, in 1892, universally esteemed and regretted, having laboured for fifteen years with singular success in the regions bordering on the Pacific.

The good Curé of St-Nicolas himself lived till 1829. In his necrology the following interesting passage occurs:

“Reckoning only on divine Providence, he invited to Liège in 1816 a Community of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, an Institute of priceless value for the education of the young, meriting the esteem of all friends of religion and humanity, having its Mother-House at Namur and establishments in many parts of Belgium. The foundation cost him much trouble, but nothing daunted him, for he foresaw how useful the Convent would be to his parish. It has grown and prospered there: besides a boarding-school for young ladies directed on the best and highest principles and worthy of the confidence of Christian parents—besides classes for externs much frequented by the children of tradespeople, these Sisters teach and train to virtuous living four or five hundred poor girls, to whom they devote themselves with incredible zeal, patience

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and charity, such as our holy religion alone can inspire."

M. Neujean's vicar was M. Dehesselles, who later on as Bishop of Namur loved to repeat to our Lady's Sisters that their Foundress was "a Saint and an Apostle."

CHAPTER XVII

The War

THE Sisters of Notre-Dame, we need hardly say, did not mix themselves up with politics. But they had their share in the sufferings entailed by the harassing, though unbloody, religious persecution which preceded the final fall of the Empire. The courageous Bishop of Ghent was expiating his apostolic firmness in exile, and the government of the flock thus left without a shepherd had been seized by a schismatic priest, the Abbé de la Brue de St-Bauzille. Usurping the title of Bishop, he made his entry into the episcopal city with the Abbé Maxime de Séguin de Pazzis, whom he styled his Vicar-General, on July 9, 1813. Every means was taken to draw the priests of the diocese into the schism, but the faithful clergy of Ghent were not to be moved. In punishment of their resistance, several of the canons and other ecclesiastical dignitaries were thrown into prison, among them the President of the Seminary, M. Van Hemme, with two of his professors. The young seminarists, whose motto at this time was: "Better to be a soldier

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than a schismatic," were either carried off to Paris to the prisons of Ste. Pélagie, or made to join a regiment in the Citadel of Wesel. Here an epidemic proved fatal to a great number. Amongst the survivors we may note the names of two young men, Messieurs Boone and Van de Kerkhove, who became distinguished members of the Society of Jesus and in after years rendered signal service to the Sisters of Notre-Dame. It was Père Van de Kerkhove who gave the eulogium, significant from the lips of a Jesuit: "Mère Julie was another Saint Ignatius by her zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls." Mère Julie was able in her journeys to be a medium of communication between some of the persecuted priests. She took messages for them to each other, and did all that lay in her power to assist these confessors of the Faith. Several found a refuge at Nouveau-Bois, and the Sisters profited by their holy ministrations. Père Bruson, however, was arrested just as he was about to give the Community their annual retreat. He was carried off by the police and incarcerated first at Vincennes, and then in the fortress of Pierre Châtel. The schismatics posted up a decree on the doors of the churches in Ghent, forbidding the celebration of Mass by any priest who had not assisted at the processional entry of the Abbé de la Brue. The Sisters at Nouveau-Bois

attended the Masses of the persecuted priests to whom they gave a refuge, but they did not venture to admit their pupils to the knowledge of this perilous secret.

Above the cloisters of the old Abbey, there is to be seen to this day a small triangular opening which gives access to a loft in which a hiding-place was arranged by the Sisters. In one night, Sister Catherine, with the aid of another Sister, constructed a wall of wicker-work whitewashed all over; this could be moved at will and the prison had an outlet on both sides of the partition. It was in making this hiding-hole that Sister Catherine caught the severe cold on her chest which ultimately caused her death. The Abbés Rensou and Fol, who afterwards became Jesuits, were concealed in this place for a considerable time; many other priests made use of it in passing. During this period of alarms and spiritual privations, Mère Julie made frequent visits to Ghent to encourage and console her daughters.

Greater dangers were at hand; the armies of Europe were daily drawing nearer to Belgium, the battlefield on which their final struggle was to take place. After the battle of Leipzig, many disabled and wounded soldiers of the *Grande Armée* passed through Namur. The citizens vied with each other in assisting these refugees; a committee was formed for the distribution of alms,

clothes, linen, etc. In all this Mère Julie took an active part, and the pupils as well as their mistresses prepared baskets of lint for the wounded. Soon afterwards the allied armies entered Namur; the prices of all articles of food rose enormously; corn, already scantily supplied, soon failed entirely. In February, 1814, Mère Julie wrote:

“We are over seventy in number to feed daily. On Saturday I sent for flour and none was to be got. Very little comes into the town now; it is so sad for our poor people who hold out their empty sacks to us, and who have such need of flour to feed their soldiers! It wrings one’s heart with pity. There is weeping in our town, for all these troops have to be fed with bread, meat and brandy.”

Mère de Bourdon writes in her *Memoirs*:

“I cannot pass over in silence the terrors we suffered at the time of the passage of the foreign troops on their way to France. Our good God mercifully preserved us from having to lodge the soldiers in our house, but we were in hourly dread of their forcing themselves in. We had been exempted, it is true, on the ground of the education given gratuitously to all the poor girls of the city; still we could not feel safe, knowing as we did that the men changed their lodgings at

will, and settled themselves where they thought they would be best entertained. This kept us always on the alert to exclude intruders and to find favourable moments for the children's entrance and exit. Our Mother had the principal door made as strong as possible with bars and bolts, and this was far from a useless precaution, as was proved by the blows it sustained day and night from the soldiers knocking for admission. We silenced all our bells and kept ourselves out of sight. The excesses which were committed by the military both in Namur and elsewhere were well calculated to alarm us. We placed the picture of Our Immaculate Mother on all our doors, with a prayer which we said daily; our dear Mother assembled us five times a day to recite together five *Paters* and *Aves*, with arms extended in the form of a cross. After grace at meals the Psalm *Miserere* was recited; the pupils used to come unsolicited to pray with the nuns for the restoration of peace. In short we did our best to unite ourselves with the petitions sent up for the same end by the whole Church. Happily God found a sufficient number of the just to disarm His anger, to take the rod from His hands, and to give hopes of a happier future."

The traditions which have reached us of those days represent Mère Julie as having been almost

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ubiquitous: during the day she watched the doors, especially when the pupils were coming in or going out; at night she watched again, but before the Blessed Sacrament, undisturbed by the redoubled blows of the soldiers and marauders as they passed the door. Her peaceful face, and brief, strong word of hope, kept up the courage of nuns and children alike during the terrors of those days, and the parents of the latter felt no anxiety about their safety while they were under Mère Julie's care. Her solicitude extended to all her houses.

"My daughter," she wrote to the Superior of St-Hubert, "pay no heed to these rumours of war. We have our great Patroness, our good and tender Mother to watch over us. Put your trust in her, and no harm will come to you. If God is for us, who shall be against us? People have tried to frighten us here at Namur, as elsewhere; but we have placed all our confidence in the Lord. We keep very quiet; we pray as much as we can. We must accustom ourselves to see everything in God. Let us love, let us love Him, my daughter, and cast our care upon His tender providence."

During those days of penury and distress no one knew how the Mother contrived to feed her

Sisters and children. It was thought, and not without reason, that God interposed miraculously in favour of His Servant. One witness relates, though without giving the exact date, that one day Mère Julie sent a Sister to fetch the provisions from the cellar; she returned empty-handed, stating that there was nothing left. "Go back again, my daughter," said Julie, "the good God will make you find what we need." The Sister obeyed, and found in fact just the provisions necessary.*

As soon as the great mass of the troops had passed, the Foundress hastened to visit her houses. At Andenne on April 12, she started for Gembloux on the 22nd; May 3 saw her at Fleurus and Jumet; the 11th at Zèle and Ghent. At the last-named place she was distressed to find the Superior of Nouveau-Bois, Sister Catherine Daulée, hopelessly ill. Worn out with work and with the severe mortifications she had imposed upon herself to obtain the cessation of schism, of persecution, and of war, she was now in the last stage of decline. At one and the same time she had the joy of seeing her beloved Mother-General and of hearing of the return of Mgr. de Broglie and the proscribed clergy. Two of the priests who were concealed in the hiding-place had been suffering from a contagious disease caught from

* Witness XIX.—*Summarium* § 37, p. 228.

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the dying soldiers. They and the Sister who nursed them were now convalescent, but Sister Catherine Daullée was going gladly to her eternal rest. When in health, death had always been to her a thought full of terrors, but now that it was near, she met it with earnest longing and the fullest trust in God. She herself begged for the last Sacraments, which she received in the community chapel, making the responses to all the prayers of the liturgy, and on the evening of the feast of the Visitation gave up her brave and beautiful soul to God. Sister Mary of Jesus (Steenhaut), who knew her well, wrote after her death of the singular examples she left to her community of self-renunciation and humility—a humility which always convinced her that her sins were the obstacle to the prosperity of her house—of her perfect observance of rule, of a life so blameless that many of her Sisters had never been able to detect in their Superior a single imperfection. “She was ripe for heaven,” wrote Mère Julie on learning her death, “and I am convinced that from her happy eternity she will be our protectress.” Catherine had indeed promised to help from heaven the dear community with which she had gone through so many trials, and for which she had sacrificed her life. She kept her word; scarcely had she breathed her last when new pupils for the *pensionnat* pre-

sented themselves, and from that moment the prosperity of Nouveau-Bois was assured. Very soon after the Sisters had the consolation of taking possession of the Abbey Church and restoring God's worship within the walls which had been so long secularized and profaned. The aged Prioress of the Monastery still lived, and begged to bear the expense of some part of the repairs.

God asked another sacrifice of Mère Julie that same year. She had a special affection for a young novice named Sister Thérésia, the sister of Marie and Ciska Steenhaut, who, when only sixteen, had followed them into the Institute, and whose sweet disposition made her the sunshine and the joy of the house at Gembloux. During the passage of the troops a detachment of Cossacks forced their way into the old Abbey. The terror they caused her occasioned a serious illness. Mère Julie went herself to fetch her, and took her to Ghent, hoping that her native air and the care of her eldest sister would restore her health. But God had other designs for the young Thérésia; she died in February, 1815, pronouncing her vows on her deathbed.

The summer of 1815 brought fresh dangers and sufferings. Napoleon was back in Paris, having escaped from the island of Elba in March. The allied armies overran Belgium. Jumet, Gembloux

and Fleurus were almost on the scene of war; Namur was close by. The Sambre formed the line of separation between the opposing forces, who were disputing the passage of the river, and the month of June saw the memorable battle of Waterloo. Mère Julie's uneasiness on her daughters' account was now increased tenfold, and her mental sufferings were aggravated by the first symptoms of the malady which declared itself a few months later. So prompt had been the movements of the French troops that there had been no time to recall to Namur the Sisters of the convents which were in the greatest danger; nor indeed would it have been safe to risk their travelling on foot through the troops who lined the roads and filled the villages. Equally impossible was it for her to go to them, as she longed to do. Her only resource was prayer; her only support, trust in God. Nor did she pray and trust in vain. Throughout these terrible days the Sisters of Notre-Dame dwelt visibly in the aid of the Most High and abode under His wings in Whom lay their Mother's hope.

The Sisters of Fleurus thus describe their adventures when the French troops were retreating after the battle of Waterloo: "The unfortunate men, exhausted with fatigue and hunger, went about seeking food. Some of them came to us, broke open the doors, and went straight to



THE CHURCH, FLEURY

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the kitchen, where they took all they could lay hands on to satisfy their cravings. Our Sisters, half dead with fright, escaped to the upper floors and fell on their knees in prayer; they heard the men mounting the stairs. There was a statue of Our Lady which could be seen through an open door, the soldiers stopped suddenly before it, turned back quickly, and left the house. They had retreated before the image of her who is terrible as an army in battle array. Hearing them depart, but fearing their return, the Sisters ran down into the garden, got over the wall in the darkness at the peril of their lives—for there was a pond at the other side—and reached at last the garden of a friend and protector, M. Oudart, who took them into his house. But even here there was no security; another troop of soldiers arrived and followed the Sisters up to the loft. M. Oudart obtained help from the police, whose appearance in the loft where the poor nuns were crouched down in a corner, caused fresh alarm. Thanks to the infinite goodness of God," the narrator concludes, "we were saved from all insult, but as for our convent it was ransacked and pillaged from top to bottom. It then became an ambulance, and when we returned to it four weeks afterwards, we found traces of the operations performed on the poor wounded men."

At Jumet, the nuns were protected by a Prus-

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sian officer who stayed in their house. A letter from the Superior Sister Leleu is preserved in the archives at Namur, labelled in Mère St-Joseph's handwriting, *Bataille de Mont St-Jean*, the name often given at that time to the battle of Waterloo. The beginning of the letter alludes to the combat which took place at Ligny.

“The good God has taken care of us like a kind Father, but, my dear Mother, I have no words to tell you what that terrible battle was like ! It was close to our house, but the good God protected us. Our doors were forced in, the men entered. Herman, the gardener, met them and said, ‘We have children here, do not make a noise, they will be frightened.’ They said, ‘We will not hurt them; we only want to eat and go away.’ Soon afterwards the Mayor sent us a guard and that saved us; we heard knocking all the night, but no one entered. Our guards behaved admirably, and we paid them all the attention we could. After the retreat had sounded they returned to us for the night; it was fortunate for us that they did so. The soldiers carried off everything M. le Curé possessed. Our gratitude to God must be eternal, I beg of you to thank Him with us: we have still three men to guard us, Herman and two others. The good God has taken pity on my weakness and has granted me for His own greater

glory a great confidence and courage. Come to us, please, as soon as the roads are free."

The Herman mentioned in this letter rendered invaluable service during this terrible time by carrying to the Mother-House, at the peril of his life, news of the Sisters, and bringing back to them words of strength and encouragement from their Blessed Mother. He cheerfully walked the eighteen or twenty miles which separate Jumet from Namur, returning again, often by night, after a short rest, strong in the prayers of her whom, to the end of his life, he held in deepest veneration. In his old age he could never speak of Mère Julie without being visibly affected, and he always lifted his cap as he pronounced her name.

Sober as it is in its details, the letter of Sister Anastasie Leleu, dated June 24, 1815, cannot be read without emotion even after a lapse of nearly a century, when one thinks of the extreme peril to which the nuns and their children were exposed. "Our gratitude to God must be eternal," writes one of the annalists of the Institute, "when-ever we behold the Lion of the Field of Waterloo."

The Community of Gembloux were thrown into consternation by seeing the farms around them all on fire, and cannon balls flying through

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the air. "The day after the great battle," says Sister Gertrude, "the French troops came pouring into the town. It was Sunday morning, and we were hoping to be left in peace, when a terrific noise was heard; the soldiers were breaking in the doors and windows of the Abbey, and beginning to pillage the place. The pupils, who were all with us at the time, screamed and shrieked with terror; we took them up to the top of the house, and sent to the commander for a guard. An officer came with some men, but by this time the invaders had broken and destroyed everything; they had knocked in the tops of the barrels in the cellar, they had taken all our provisions, breaking the locks of the cupboards; the silver spoons and forks of the children, and even the table cloths and napkins were carried off. After these exploits the Frenchmen left us, but it was only to be succeeded by the Prussians, and these, driven to desperation by three days' fighting and neither food nor rest, prepared to pillage in their turn. Fortunately for us our Vicar got us a guard, a good Prussian officer with three men. He spoke French well, and acted towards us like a father. We looked upon him as sent from heaven. He was a religious man, and his conversation was full of piety. Under his protection we were able to rest a little that night. Now that the troops have gone, we have



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the camp followers and marauders who leave no one in peace. The Mayor has sent us a confidential gendarme to watch our house during the night. He himself has lost everything, his house was pillaged. Our good Curé with his two Vicaires had the same fate; they do all they can to help us, notwithstanding their own losses."

Mère St-Joseph gives these details of what took place at Namur: "After the defeat of Napoleon's grand army* nearly all that was left of it, to the number of forty thousand, poured into Namur on the 19th of June. Early the next day, the Prussians were at the gates of the city. All day long firing went on between the conquerors and the conquered, no cannon, however, was used. The French had not more than two pieces, the Prussians had plenty, but the commander was generous enough to abstain from bombarding the town, which would soon have been reduced to ashes. He acted thus, it was said, in return for the hospitality the Prussians had received shortly before in our city. The combat would have been over sooner and the Germans would have lost fewer men by using cannon, but the town would have been destroyed. The allies entered at six in the evening by one gate, while the French retreated at the opposite one. Many attributed the preservation of the town to the protection of the

*At Ligny.

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Blessed Virgin. The inhabitants in their gratitude erected an altar in the Cathedral, and there was a solemn service of thanksgiving besides several Masses for the same intention." Mère St-Joseph continues: "I have no intention of writing a history of the war—there are plenty of others to do that—but a history of the care taken of us by the tender Providence of God. It is a just tribute of gratitude which I would offer to His Majesty, and hand down as a duty to those who come after us. Our Sisters can never thank God enough for having preserved us from such frightful perils and protected us, like the best and most loving of Fathers." Mère Julie's anxious solicitude during these stormy times is thus described: "Our good Mother was too deeply attached to her daughters, whom she looked on as a precious deposit entrusted to her by God, not to suffer acutely both in her soul and body from the knowledge she had of the dangers to which they were exposed. She bore up under it all with her usual fortitude, she encouraged us and inspired confidence in our hearts while her own was in such anguish, but one could see by the change in her features and even by the first symptoms of an illness which was to be her last, that her sensitive nervous system had been fatally shaken. Her energy never flagged, she watched over everything. She had some of the religious always in prayer before

the Blessed Sacrament, and she entered into all the measures taken to help the poor inhabitants and the wounded soldiers. She went herself to the hospitals to visit and exhort the dying, and gave abundant alms."

A reminiscence both of the terrible campaign and of their Blessed Mother reached the Mother-House of Namur by a somewhat curious chance. In 1891 a French journal published the following article, entitled "A Survivor of Waterloo":

"Among the rare survivors of the wars of the First Empire is Mme. de Valeriola, now residing at Poizat. When a girl she lived with her parents on an estate near Ligny, to which belonged the mill of Bry. On the day of the battle of Ligny Napoleon rested for a little while in this mill, which had been transformed into an ambulance. Here Mme. de Valeriola herself attended on the wounded, both during and after the battle. She relates many details of the fight with the most perfect lucidity of mind. Notwithstanding her advanced age, Mme. de Valeriola takes long walks with the help of her stick. She has had fourteen children, eight of whom are still living. She was brought up in Belgium at a convent of the Dames Françaises founded by some emigrant nuns."

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Inquiry proved that the "Dames Françaises" in question were the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Namur, and that the venerable old lady, whose piety is the edification of her parish, had been a pupil of Sister Eulalie and Mère Blinde Bourdon. She at once recognized Mère Julie's portrait, and remembered kissing as a child the crucifix that hung from her large rosary.

As soon as regular communication was restored, Mère Julie, regardless of her indisposition, hastened to visit all the convents which had suffered most from the terrors of the war. On July 6 she was on her way to Jumet and Fleurus; on the 27th she set off for Ghent and Zèle, and a little later she undertook her last journey to St-Hubert and to Picardy. In the course of that memorable year, notwithstanding all her fatigues and infirmities, the Servant of God found time to write numerous letters to her daughters, to reanimate their courage and to give them the last counsels of her mature experience. There is a special *cachet* about the conferences and letters belonging to this period, an ineffable accent of tenderness, and a burning zeal for the perfection of the souls entrusted to her. Her letters distil a very perfume of candour, of simplicity, of deep humility, mingled with an insatiable love of the cross and a confidence in God that has reached heroism. It would seem that, as her end drew nigh, the

Blessed Mother was redoubling her efforts to strengthen the foundations of the work God had committed to her by pouring into the souls of her spiritual children robust virtue, a courage equal to every trial, and the vigorous sap of sound doctrine. The fragments which we detach here and there with reverent fingers from her letters show what was the ideal she had formed of the spiritual character of a Sister of Notre-Dame. Early in the May of 1815, she wrote to the Superior of Fleurus:

“In all the unhappy circumstances of the times we live in, we must cleave so strongly to our good God that nothing can trouble us. My heart is ready to melt with gratitude towards God for thus sheltering us under His wings in the midst of all this tumult of war. My God, my God, what thanksgivings of ours can pay Thee for so many benefits? We can only thank Thee worthily through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy divine Son. Oh, yes! we trust to His infinite merits. . . . Ah! my daughters, this is not a time to think of anything but continual prayer. And then confidence, always confidence! We have no motive for fear, we have a thousand motives for hope.”

And again, after the pillage of the convent of Fleurus:

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"Do not be troubled at your losses; keep very calm and quiet, no one could have foreseen what has happened. Never can you thank God enough for having been preserved from much worse misfortunes. . . . Many times a day my heart flies to you, and this forced delay is no little sacrifice to me. Let us stand firm in all our vicissitudes and trials, seeking only the greater glory of God.

"Oh! would to heaven [she writes to the same a little later], would to heaven that we had as much love for God as we have for ourselves! Simplicity is the true way to find God. Let us get ready for death by a life which is all for God and our duty. Grace has its moments and passes quickly. Let us be very faithful to it. . . . Oh my daughter, how much we need to watch over ourselves if we are to acquire the habit of living in God's holy presence, that habit so necessary to our spiritual advancement!"

And then she makes them the characteristic recommendation not to talk to people about all they have gone through:

"You have our Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for your confidant, you have your garden for your recreations among yourselves; that is enough for good Sisters of Notre-Dame."

To St-Hubert she writes:

"God asks of us not promises but efforts, sustained, persevering efforts; for a work like ours we ought to have *saints ready made*, whereas we have all yet to be made saints. At least let us give ourselves to the work with all our hearts and strength."

In the summer of the same eventful year the community of Andenne lost their devoted friend and pastor M. Kinet, who was named to a more important post. Julie writes:

"Here is a trial for you, but, as you say, the good God is our Father, and in Him must be all our trust. God alone! God alone! Ah! happy a thousand times those who lean upon no one but their Lord; whatever He may send them, they are never shaken. Let us rest in God—He turns all things together unto good for those who love Him. So let us go on our way, ever straight to our good God, leaving Providence to do His work. Life is full of changes; all things pass, and we along with them; let us abandon ourselves to God and lean on Him alone."

The house at Fleurus had been much tried in divers ways; how strong, in the magnanimity of her faith, are the Foundress' words of consolation:

“My Dear Daughter—God will always be your support and your strength in the midst of the little storms which He suffers to arise. Know this, my child, that if your little convent of Fleurus were not visited by crosses and tribulations, I should tremble, and I should think it was not the work of the good God. Contradictions, humiliations, persecutions—those are the true marks by which the work of God is to be recognized. Oh! yes, my dear daughter, the seal of the Cross must be set upon it—the cross in yourself, the cross in others, the cross in your children—then our dear Master will know you for His own. But then that cross must be faithfully and lovingly borne. Courage! God will not let His servants be tried beyond their strength; He has said He will not. And again He has said: ‘I will be with you in tribulation, to bear you up.’ Found all your hope on God, without restriction. . . . I have the conviction that you understand this doctrine, and that you will put it in practice. I pray God so much for you! What you are going through now is only a little sample. Remember what our Lord Jesus Christ said of St. Paul: ‘I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name’s sake.’ So then, do not be afraid of suffering too much; rather be afraid not to be found worthy to suffer for the blessed interests of the good God and His greater glory. . . . Good-bye, my

dearest daughter. Let us live by the cross, and we shall die of love."

Lastly, in her letters to Sister Anastasie Leleu, that soul so attuned to Julie's own, the same note rings out:

"You tell me that you possess some particles of the true Cross; honour it well, the Cross of our Divine Saviour, for it is the very foundation of our holy Institute. Ask the grace to make good use of your precious relic—let the sight of it strengthen you in God."

Again on November/8:

"Courage! Let us all bend to the good pleasure of God. We must have crosses, but do not let us choose our own; let us leave the hand of our good God to give them to us; He knows so well the exact measure of our strength. . . . I think so often of the primitive Church. My God, who are we, that we should even so much as think of the work which Thou puttest into our hands? Poor, miserable things that we are, beginning with her who is scribbling this letter! Never mind, we must always go on along the road where God has set us. Provided we do not want for crosses, all will go well; if we carry the cross as we ought, it will be a strong foundation to our holy Institute. . . .

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Oh! how different are the thoughts of God from ours. Yes, He began this work with nothing, nothing. . . . He will continue it, and, by His grace, He will perfect it. My dear daughter, if we were to talk till to-morrow, we should not have said all there is to say of the goodness of God towards our little Institute. It is the mustard-seed of the Gospel; may it become a great tree and shelter many birds of the air.

“Ask, my dear child, for yourself, for all your Sisters, that only true science of *knowing how to carry the cross well*. Ask that I may follow my blessed Jesus to complete death to self.”

CHAPTER XVIII

The Last Cross

“THE Providence of God worked at the purification of our Mother up to the very end. The last trial of all was perhaps the hardest for her sensitive nature to bear; and yet it need not trouble or perplex us; rather we should look upon it as one of those persecutions which God Himself contrives for the sanctification of His elect. The instruments He makes use of to inflict the pain act often with a perfectly right intention. Our Mother herself, at a time when neither she nor I had the slightest suspicion of the trouble which was brewing, said to me one day: ‘My daughter, I have still another persecution to go through.’ I answered, as St. Peter to our Lord: ‘No, ma Mère, that shall not be; you have suffered everything at Amiens.’ But she rejoined: ‘It was foretold to me that I should be persecuted by bishops, by priests, *and by the Sisters*; all is not over!’ That prediction dated very far back; it had been made by the Father of whom God had made use to cure her.”

In these words Mère St-Joseph introduces us

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to the final martyrdom of spirit wherein the vision of Compiègne saw its completion, and the last threads which held the Servant of God to earth were snapped, that her soul might fly and be at rest.

The cross Mère Julie looked for was to come to her from Ghent. Napoleon, whose extravagant autocracy was bent on regulating everything himself, even the religious instruction of his subjects, had caused a manual to be published under the title of *The Universal Catechism of the Empire*, in which were inserted the famous Four Propositions of 1682 and other Gallican errors. The idea got abroad in Flanders that Mgr. Pisani had accepted it, although, in point of fact, as Mère St-Joseph states expressly in her narrative, "not only did he never introduce this Catechism into his diocese, but we owe it to him that the Government desisted from forcing it on the country." Certain ecclesiastics of the diocese of Ghent and Tournay, seeing their own bishops condemned to the honours of exile and imprisonment for their courageous resistance to the imperial encroachments on the liberty of the Church, and the Bishop of Namur, on the contrary, left in peaceable possession of his see, concluded, without further inquiry, that he had played into the hands of the persecutor. The conclusion was a thoroughly false one; the fact was that Mgr. Pisani

happened to be a very old friend of the Minister Portalis, who had been able to influence Napoleon in his favour. Furthermore, it was part of the Emperor's policy not to interfere with those bishops who had been appointed by himself. Mère Julie was loyally devoted to her chief pastor and superior, and warmly defended his honour and reputation. The suspicions which fell upon him cast, therefore, their shadow over her, and she had to suffer very bitter treatment in consequence. The following extract from a letter addressed by her to the Vicar-General of Ghent, M. Le Surre, in justification of her conduct, lets us know where the chief sting of this "persecution of the good" lay for her mother's heart:

"You are not ignorant, Sir, of the troubles which have arisen concerning certain religious opinions and the *Universal Catechism*. M—— has put into the heads of the young Sisters at G—— some fears that I should adopt the views of my Bishop, whom they accuse of leaning towards the suspected opinions. I have been for some years past attacked in the extremest manner about him. I can say nothing against my own Bishop; he is my superior, and I have no concern with the matters referred to. But, in Flanders, certain persons have turned against me on account of this; my religious Sisters have been warned

about me as if I were likely to lead them into error; in fact, I have borne the most violent attacks without having given any cause for them. M. Van Schouwenberghe* has always been my adviser in these difficult moments, he has always possessed my entire confidence, and, thanks be to God, I have done nothing without his counsel."

"Never," adds Mère St-Joseph, "never could I give an idea of what Mère Julie had to suffer about this affair. What teasing, what painful anxiety, what alarms of conscience did they not cause her for things which time and experience have since proved she had no share in. Our Mother loved nothing more than peace, and for the purity of the faith she would have sacrificed a thousand lives. I have seen her tears flow on these occasions, but God, Who dwelt in her heart, soon dispersed the clouds. He led her by the safe road of humility and obedience, and He kept her in such peace that neither in her heart nor in her words did she ever fail in the duties of respect or of charity. The superior whom God had placed over her† was during these painful circumstances the mark for much contradiction from the persons above referred to, and the blow rebounded on our Mother, who was grieved beyond measure at these differences. They acted as if she were

* Secretary of Mgr. de Broglie.

† Mgr. Pisani.

concerned in all this, and as if there might be something to fear from her—from her, who had always been so simple and true in her ardent love for Holy Church. I do not know what sort of zeal animated these otherwise excellent persons. I can only say that the charity of our Mother excused everything. ‘They mean well,’ she used to say.”

During a journey to France, which she undertook about this time for the business of the Institute, she had an interview with Père Varin on the subject of the accusations brought against her; and in a letter written to Mère St-Joseph from Montdidier on July 13, 1814, we read:

“*Ma bonnie amie*—I went over to Amiens to see our good Father Varin. I was very pleased with the interview. He takes a very sensible view of past events. He had heard of what I had to suffer at Ghent; he is very far from thinking what you know. The rest I will tell you when I come.”*

There were other causes of pain and trouble. Sister Catherine, the Superior of the Nouveau-Bois, had attached herself with some rigidity to the customs observed at Amiens in the beginning of the Institute; she made no distinction, apparently, between the Rule drawn up by Père Varin

* Letter No. 147 to Mère St-Joseph.

in conjunction with the Foundress and a certain manuscript *Coutumier* for the order of the day arranged by Julie herself, and which, in her position, and in these tentative beginnings, she was obviously at liberty to alter according as circumstances and the development of her Society required it. In the mind of certain outsiders, too, some confusion seems to have arisen in connection with a so-called "Rule" of the Institute of Mary, which was sometimes read to the Sisters. It had been put into Julie's hands by the Fathers of the Faith simply as furnishing matter for pious thought, and without the least notion of its forming a rule of life for persons following a vocation wholly different to that of the Roman ladies for whom it had been originally composed. God permitted that, in these last days of the purification of His Servant, several of her daughters should be blinded for a season in her regard, and, entering into Sister Catherine's rigorist views, should judge the conduct of the Foundress as infringing religious observance. Hitherto God had let her see into her children's hearts, but now all was hidden from her eyes. "Our good Mother," say the *Memoirs*, "had no idea of what was passing in the minds of some of her daughters. She used to say to me with perfect simplicity: 'I do not attach myself rigorously to prescriptions of this sort when I see a greater good to be attained.' But in

the minds of certain Sisters, anxious for what they thought greater perfection, these things were irrevocable. After all, everything happened by the permission of God."

Mère St-Joseph gives no names; but we know that they included some of those dearest to Julie and justly most honoured in the Institute. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and, though grieved, we need not be surprised to find that not only Catherine Daullée, whose words had kept so many others to their allegiance, not only Sister Marie Steenhaut, the first of Julie's Belgian children, but "Ciska" herself, the holy little Superior of Gembloux, who, before these clouds arose, had been filled with such singular esteem and affection for the Servant of God, fell victims to his delusions. After Julie's death the veil dropped from their eyes; one and all deeply deplored their error, and Gertrude tried to repair her fault by drawing up a paper which is at once a record of her Mother's sanctity, and a memorial of her own temptation. After giving many instances of the gift which the Servant of God possessed of reading the minds and hearts of her daughters, Sister Gertrude continues:

"In spite of the high esteem in which I held our dear Mother's virtue, the devil, jealous of the glory which my entire confidence in her gave to

God, and of the profit which it brought to my own soul, contrived to fill my mind with darkness and perplexity on the subject of certain exterior actions of hers; and what had once seemed to me zeal now appeared to me to proceed from natural impetuosity and to lack discretion. What increased, and in fact originated the temptation, was that some Sisters communicated to me their own imaginations concerning our General. Seeing them so fixed in their opinion, I thought it must be presumption in me to think myself more enlightened than they, and finally adopted their notions. Then, urged on doubtless by the devil, who had ensnared me by this false mistrust of myself, I went so far as to confirm some in their opinion. In short, I know not what spirit impelled me. . . . I can only say that I had the best intention in the world. . . .

“At the present day, [she adds], writing after the death of our revered Mother, I see things in another light: what I thought exaggerated and extraordinary in her conduct now appears to add fresh lustre to her life by wonderful examples of virtues which are rarely seen in persons of her sex. Notwithstanding all the pain she must naturally have felt in being thus misjudged by her own daughters, she preserved the most perfect calmness of mind; she never tried to vindicate herself, but having at heart the glory of God and

the propagation of her Institute, she employed with great prudence the means which would lead her children to love not herself, but Truth alone. The more I consider her life, the more persuaded I am that she was guided by the Spirit of God."*

From blaming the conduct of their Mother in secret, the Sisters passed to open discontent. Then it was that the Foundress laid her difficulties a second time before M. Le Surre. She tells him she has heard from outsiders of the accusations lodged against her as to the alleged non-observance of the Rule at Namur. She points out that the Mother-House, being the nursery and school of the Order, stands on a very different footing from the much less numerous community of Ghent; that at the former place it is necessary to give a great deal of time to the instruction of the young religious; that hence it is impossible that every point of the first *Coutumier* should be strictly adhered to. This letter, of which only a fragment has come down to us, would by itself leave us somewhat in the dark; but Mère St-Joseph has let us know what the supposed infractions of religious observance really were, and her words are wholly in praise of the Servant of God:

"She did not insist that the same thing should always be done at the same hour if another use-

* *Memoirs*, IV, p. 93.

ful thing presented itself. The chief end of the Institute being the teaching of Christian Doctrine, Mère Julie made no difficulty about entrenching upon what was less important in order to prolong the religious instruction. In fact, she often did so."

At Ghent it appears that the daily exercises followed each other in unchanging order, and that this mathematical regularity was looked upon as essential.

Later on, the line of conduct followed by the Servant of God was acknowledged to be the right one, and in the Rules of the Congregation approved by the Holy See in 1844, we find this clause, which exactly meets the case alluded to above: "Having often experienced that it is not always possible to perform the different exercises in every house at the same hour, they shall sacrifice this religious harmony for the sake of the instruction of children, believing that this will be agreeable to God. They shall gently accommodate themselves to local circumstances, making themselves all to all, as St. Paul says, in order to gain souls to Jesus Christ."

The prejudices which had arisen in the diocese of Ghent were echoed in that of Tournay, and even to some extent in Namur itself; some of the clergy went so far as to suggest dividing the Institute according to the dioceses, in order to

separate the Mother-House from Flanders and Hainault. It was then that Mgr. Pisani, as it would seem at Julie's own request, gave to the Congregation a special ecclesiastical Superior in the person of his Vicar-General, the Abbé Médard. This was about six months before the death of the Foundress.

A confidential letter from Mère St-Joseph to Sister Anastasie Leleu, the Superior at Jumet, throws light on this critical period:

"You cannot, I think, do otherwise than show our Rule to the Curé, as he asks it and he is your confessor. Since he already rejects the authority of the ecclesiastical Superior of Namur, I hardly know whether it is wise to tell him that arrangements are being made here to get something more stable and fixed.*

"I believe, my dear Sister Anastasie, that God will allow us to be greatly exercised and tried by good priests as well as by our Sisters. If each diocese sets to work to govern us after its own fashion, what fine music we shall have! You know well these are just the difficulties we wish to avoid by having the authority of our Superior-General recognised by all; otherwise I do not see

* The primitive Rule of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, completed by Mère St-Joseph according to the intentions of the Foundress, was approved by Mgr. Pisani in 1818. The approbation of the Holy See was given in 1844.

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how there can be any unity, and there would indeed be great fear that when she is gone each one would want something different. You and I are the two eldest of the family; we have seen and known the beginnings of our Society. Others cannot appreciate our Mother as we do, who have seen how long and how gradually she was prepared and disposed for the work which she has carried out so admirably. And if we look at the result as a whole, we cannot but see how abundantly it has been blessed despite all the cavilling that human weakness and ignorance, helped by the malice of the devil, have never ceased to raise against it. Our Mother is sincerely delighted that all this has been the means of procuring us an ecclesiastical Superior. I believe we may congratulate ourselves on the appointment; but whatever is settled between our Mother and himself must be accepted by the other dioceses, or things will go on badly. I only wish that all had her energy, zeal and forgetfulness of self; there would not be so much fuss made about the trifles she is reproached with, if people could understand the excellence of the qualities with which God has endowed her. I can scarcely believe that the Sisters of Ghent would make any formal complaints of their Mother. I thought the displeasure shown by Mgr. of Ghent had originated at Namur;*

* i.e. on account of Mgr. Pisani, the Bishop.

whatever may have been the cause, God knows it, and that is enough. Our Mother is not troubled on her own account, only so far as the interests of God are concerned; she has no more resentment than an infant. Let us endeavour to imitate her by forming ourselves to the practice of solid virtues. After all, as long as we are on this earth we must be prepared for a host of faults and shortcomings."

Julie's charity has deprived us of almost all the documents relating to this episode, perhaps the most painful in her life. God did not suffer it to bring about any rupture in the Institute. Neither did it cause any fundamental breach of internal concord and charity. The pain did its work in the Saint's soul and in those of her daughters, and all served to throw into stronger light after her death the wisdom of her government and the heroism of her virtue. Mère St-Joseph thus winds up her account:

"God gave our Mother all the qualities needed for the work He entrusted to her, and which she so happily accomplished. What intrepidity under all events and accidents! What courage to suffer and to undertake! What calm in the depths of her soul! Who that has gone to her for help with childlike trust has not been supported in her infirmities by the strength of her great soul? All

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this would assuredly tend to increase our sorrow at the want of confidence shown by some, if we did not clearly see that this trial was specially permitted by God before He took her to Himself, in order to purify her by so keen a suffering, to bring out her meekness of heart in all its beauty, and to perfect her other virtues. In a word, it was the finishing-stroke of the fashioning of her soul, the last bitterness in the chalice which she had so nearly drained."*

It was in the midst of these troubles, in the year 1815, that Mère Julie accomplished a work of zeal unknown at the time to all but Mère Blinde Bourdon, who took part in it and has recorded it in her memoirs. They brought about the return to the Church of a community of nuns obstinately attached to a schism known as Stevenism. The sect originated with Canon Corneille Stévens, a learned and pious priest but an excessive rigorist; he had refused to sign a formula, regarding the acceptance of the Concordat, promulgated by the predecessor of Mgr. Pisani, and the result was that he became the founder of an ephemeral schism resembling what was called in France "la petite Église." The supporters of Canon Stévens called themselves "non-communicants;" they refused to submit to their Bishop, and acknowledged

**Memoirs*, IV, p. 61.

the Canon alone as their spiritual superior. Some of the clergy joined this party and set episcopal censures at defiance; it was not uncommon to find in the same parish two incumbents, one appointed by Stévens, the other by the Bishop, and families were sometimes divided between the two parties. The first efforts of Mgr. Pisani to effect a reunion, when he succeeded to the See of Namur, met with little success. It was only after the fall of the French Empire that, at the urgent entreaty of the Duke of Beaufort, Governor of Belgium, a generous appeal to the clergy was made which brought about the extinction of the schism. The ecclesiastics who had held out, came to offer their submission to the Bishop, and in the end M. Stévens himself gave in: no one remained outside the Church except a very few isolated and obstinate sectaries. Among these was a certain Abbé T—, who was the spiritual director of some Ursuline nuns at Jumet. His influence over them and over the community of the same order at Namur was so great that, although suspended by his Bishop, he continued to exercise his functions among them, and they refused to accept the ministrations of any other priest. Mgr. Pisani, deeply distressed, exerted every means in his power to bring about a reconciliation. All was unavailing, and when he presented himself in person at the convent, he was refused admittance.

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At last he bethought himself of begging Mère Julie to try and bring back the deluded religious to their duty. They had been obliged to take off the habit of their order and dress as seculars, and they were forbidden to approach the Sacraments. Mère Julie took Mère St-Joseph with her when she visited them. Both were well received, and by degrees their charitable efforts obtained the desired result; the nuns acknowledged their error, and one by one made their submission to the Bishop. They were not yet all converted at the time of Mère Julie's death; Mère St-Joseph obtained the last retractation. In 1817 they made a public reparation by following the procession of the Blessed Sacrament with cords round their necks; after this they were allowed to resume the habit of their Order, and to re-enter their convent. Mademoiselle Antoinette Malevé,* who died in 1880, related how consoled the Bishop had been, and how edified the people, by the generous reparation of the penitent nuns. She had heard the Bishop say to her own father, (himself a converted Stevenist), "Without Mère Julie and her holy companion, these poor deluded religious would have died in schism. Their zeal did it all, but oh! at what cost to themselves! Thus has God rewarded their faith and trust in the unjust persecution which brought

* This lady lived for years as parlour-boarder with the Ursulines of Namur.

them to Namur." The community, once restored to the bosom of the Church, was ever afterwards distinguished for its piety and regularity. The director who had misled the Sisters did not imitate them in their submission: he sought a refuge in the house of a gentleman at Jumet who, believing his Curé to be unjustly persecuted, gave him hospitality for a time. It was not long, however, before he found out his mistake, and, submitting to the ecclesiastical authorities, shut his doors on the schismatical priest. This unfortunate man died without abandoning his errors, and the young man who had followed him as acolyte ended his days as a freethinker. Another Stevenist priest, however, for whose conversion Mère Julie had performed many penances, and who had constantly visited her, made his submission. The Abbé Stévens died in 1828, protesting obedience and submission to the Sovereign Pontiff. The anti-concordat party soon came to an end. None of the clergy belonged to it, and the few adherents that remained in the town of Eccloo (Eastern Flanders) submitted in 1852 to the Sovereign Pontiff and the Bishop of Ghent.

CHAPTER XIX
Death of Mère Julie

NOTWITHSTANDING the knowledge which Mère Julie seems to have had of the approaching end of her labours, there was no sign of abated energy in her work. "God and my duty are my sole occupation," she had written at the close of 1815 to the Superior of Jumet; she could not think of rest so long as there was work for God to do on earth. She took advantage of the two retreats of 1815 to give her parting advice to the Sisters of Notre-Dame, who met for the last time around their Mother. There is always something grave and touching about dying counsels; but when they fall from the lips of a saint, these *novissima verba* are doubly beautiful and venerable. The chief concern of the Servant of God was the true spirit of the Institute. "It was not established by human means," she said, "it can neither increase nor be supported, any more than it can be uprooted, by man. What is chiefly important, my dear Sisters, is the preservation of its primitive spirit—the spirit of perfect union, of tender charity, of abso-

lute equality." Like St. John the Apostle, she came back again and again on this mutual charity. "We must be united together," she loved to repeat, "as the stones of a building are united by the mortar. Charity must be our predominant virtue: the strong must support the weak." And again: "Yes, my dear daughters, be filled with the spirit of Jesus, which is a spirit of love, a spirit of mutual forbearance with faults. O my dearest children, how much I desire to see among you that courtesy, that good understanding with each other, that perfect conformity, which makes people able to say when they see any one of you: 'They are all just like each other.'"

She insisted constantly on this last thought. "A person who sees one Sister of Notre-Dame must be convinced that he sees them all. Amongst us there must be no distinction between those employed in household duties and those engaged in teaching. Equality in all things!—no particular affection between those Sisters who come from the same country; but let all unite together like waters which have left their source to flow together in one stream. The recreations should be passed sweetly and gently in mutual communication, in which all the Sisters, though from different parts of the world, speak the same language, so that none may seem strangers where all have but one heart and one soul. Finally, let

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there be no warm discussions; where there is a difference of opinion sacrifice your own way of thinking in favour of charity."

But there can be no true charity without humility. "We must have humble souls," cried out the Servant of God in words which paint herself "humble souls are courageous souls, apostolic souls, souls that *go out of themselves*, and those are the sort of souls which our Institute demands."

"My dear Sisters," she said on another occasion, "let our submission to authority be constant and perfect. To me personally you owe nothing, but you owe respect and submission to her who holds the place of God in your regard; thus considered, your Superior has a right to honour, love and obedience from you, however wretched she may be. If you allow yourselves to criticize her conduct, to reason about her commands or her prohibitions, you are on the wrong road, and you will be severely punished at the Judgement Seat of God." How firmly, in another conference, she inculcated the necessity of "that good, solid foundation of mortification, without which no Sister of Notre-Dame is possible." With what ardour she poured into the souls of her daughters that *invictus amor Crucis** which, both by word and example, she had preached throughout her

*Collect of the Mass of B. Julie.

whole life, warning them, however, against "those crosses which people forge for themselves, and which are very heavy without being in the least meritorious"! With what a burst of almost eloquence she exclaimed one evening: "My dear children, if you have docile, well-prepared hearts, the Holy Spirit Himself will teach you more than I should ever be able to say to you about the dispositions of a true Sister of Notre-Dame. We must have in our Institute magnanimous souls, frightened at nothing, fearing temptations no more than they fear flies buzzing around. Ah! let us not render void the grace of our vocation. A crowd of souls would rise up against us at the Last Day, and would say to us: 'You are the cause of my eternal damnation; if you had been more united to God, you would have won my heart. You passed for a person consecrated to God, but you were so only in appearance.' . . . Do you think, my children, that I justify myself before God? If you have not made more progress in the interior life, whose is the fault? Mine, first and foremost." And the Sister who took notes of this instruction adds that here Mère Julie fell upon her knees before the Sisters and "humbled herself to the very dust."

"God works," she added, "in a soul which puts the reins into His hands; He ennobles it, He divinizes it. When one sets about it with

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one's whole heart, the work is soon done. Do not make bargains with our good God; give Him a free field of action (*donnez-lui à couper en plein drap*). Say to Him: 'Here I am, my God! cut, sever, spare me not.' . . . And then make war upon your own self-will. . . . Try it, and, by God's grace, you will understand what I say."

At the close of that memorable retreat of 1815 the Blessed Servant of God must have been consoled to see with what perfect union and charity the Sisters, gathered from the different houses, consulted together about methods of teaching, showed each other different kinds of needlework, and mutually shared the fruits of their knowledge and experience. Natural talent seemed doubled by the grace of their apostolate, and all had but one heart and one soul for the cause of God.

Her correspondence, as we have seen, continued unbroken. From the time of the re-establishment of the Society of Jesus in 1814 all her letters are signed, "Julie, *called Sister Ignatius*, most unworthy Sister of Notre-Dame"; they are full of the thought of death.

"Say a prayer every day that I, who am getting so old, may have the grace to refer all my actions to eternity. I fear to find myself suddenly surprised by death. . . . A few moments more

and we shall no longer exist! Let us never lose sight of that Eye which sees all things, that Ear which hears all things, that Hand which writes all things. . . . Keep your lamps trimmed, as wise virgins waiting for the Bridegroom."

The great feasts of Our Lady marked, as we have more than once pointed out, the main incidents of Julie's religious life. Her death-summons came with the first vespers of that supreme privilege of Mary, the devotion to which, twenty-one years before, she had bound herself by vow to propagate.

On December 7, 1815, she had a heavy fall on the staircase leading to the chapel. She fainted and was carried to her room, but, on coming to herself, would only allow the most ordinary remedies, and at once resumed her usual occupations, notwithstanding violent headache and a general *malaise*, soon accentuated by a severe cold.

It was the beginning of her last illness—a long four months of suffering and weakness. But suffering was no stranger to Julie Billiard, and she welcomed it smiling. On the 16th she writes to the Superior of Jumet:

"So people have judged me unfavourably!* Ah! how good that is to help me to die to my wretched

* About the dismissal of a novice.

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self-love, and to the esteem of creatures, which I must trample underfoot. Provided that I do what my God asks of me, for His greater glory, for the interests of Him who is my good Father, what matter to me the judgements of men? . . . But as for that of my dear daughter Anastasie! Oh! there are no limits to her charity for her poor Mother; in her eyes, no one is so perfect as her Mother; and when people say to her this comes from '*ma Mère*,' '*ma Mère* said that,' all is said. After that, go and see what the good God thinks of it all. . . . He does not always think like my daughter Anastasie at Jumet! If I had to be judged by you, my daughter, I might expect a very favourable verdict! See how I am joking; a little joke does good now and again."

And all Julie's old self is in the following lines written to the same on December 21:

"Tell all my dear children, especially those who are following our sweet Jesus most closely in the blessedness of His naked poverty and in detachment from self, that I wish them an increase of grace that shall make them reach the poverty of our Saviour as He lies in the miserable crib. Let us try, my dear, to take that road ourselves and to lead others along it, for it is the path our divine Model came to point out to us. I will go and see you as soon as ever I can. If your heart

is full, so too is mine. But here is the holy crib of our dear Jesus; I will place everything in it; everything, everything. I believe that before very long we shall see things we should never have dreamed of. Patience! God has his designs; let us adore them with our whole heart. Tell my dear daughters that I hope to find them all at the feet of our sweet Lord in the stable of Bethlehem with the good shepherds. Let us join with each other in doing a holy violence to heaven, so as to win the grace of the spiritual birth of the Christ-Child in our souls! Ask it for me especially, my daughter—I need it so much—Oh! yes, more than all of you put together. I shall carry you all, my daughters, to the Cradle of our Blessed Saviour, and put you, each and all, into His Sacred Heart. . . . Who is going to get to the stable first? Let us go there early, dear daughter, so as to secure a place . . . let us abide in the adorable Heart of Jesus where we can always, always meet, in spite of the fury which hell is arming against us. But, as the hymn says, '*Je ne crains rien, Jésus est avec moi!*'

"Let us do what we can, our very best, to gain a blessed eternity; it is worth the trouble, is it not? . . ."

The cross was rapidly doing its last work in the soul of the Servant of God. "I used often to

notice on her countenance," says Mère Blin de Bourdon, "an expression of mingled joy and pain. At other times it was all pain, and her glistering eyes told me without words that her soul too was suffering." But she never lost her serenity. The peace of God rested on her emaciated face and lit up the old smile that still came so readily to lips from which words now fell very seldom. In all she said or did it was apparent that her soul was ready to take its flight, that not a fibre of attachment held it to earth. She became extremely weak, and was unable to take any solid food; even liquids could only be administered drop by drop and with the greatest difficulty.

On January 13, 1816, she performed a last act of self-humiliation. Some exaggerated complaints had been made to her of Sister Eulalie Delaporte's imprudent neglect of her health, and Mère Julie had imposed a somewhat severe penance. But "the Holy Ghost," says Mère St-Joseph, "suffers not the lightest imperfection to pass unrecognised in hearts that are sincere," and she soon learnt her mistake. Then the Blessed Mother, "who never did things by halves with God," went straight to Sister Eulalie's room, and said: "My child, you have good reasons to be vexed with me, have you not? I judged you rashly on hearsay." And she knelt down and begged pardon of the Sister, who also went on her knees, and

they prayed for a little space together. As Mère Julie rose she said, "You shall soon be convinced, my dear child, that I have nothing whatever against you in my heart." "And yet," Sister Eulalie would add, as she told the story with tears, "the correction had been just, and entirely in my own interest."

The very next day she was obliged to take to her bed. Before doing so she embraced all her daughters, as she was accustomed to do before setting out on a long journey, so that they felt convinced she knew she was to die. Indeed, it was the opinion of M. Médard, the Vicar-General and ecclesiastical Superior of the Community, as well as of the Sisters, that she had been supernaturally enlightened as to the time of her death. Then, though no one thought her in danger, she at once asked for the Last Sacraments, which, in presence of the weeping community, she received, say the Acts of the Process, with extreme fervour and with the most perfect abandonment of herself into the hands of her heavenly Father. From her girlhood Julie had received Holy Communion daily; she did so still during her last illness, and by a special help from God, even when she could scarcely swallow a drop of water, she was able to communicate with ease, so that, say the *Memoirs*, almost to the very end she partook every day of that food which was sweetness to

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her soul. Many priests of the city, penetrated with respect for her holiness, and anxious to enjoy the edification of her virtue, begged the favour of carrying the Holy Viaticum to her.*

"There are persons," remarks Mère St-Joseph, "who keep up their confidence in God fairly well so long as they are in health, but who, when sickness comes, and especially when death is at hand, fall into a state of trouble; but the hope of our dear Mother remained always firm."† She had allowed the ordinary doctor to be called in "for the honour of the house," as she playfully said, and to please the bishop, who had insisted on her taking care of her health; and she submitted, as her Rule requires, with the simplicity of a child to all his prescriptions, though well aware they could do her no good. "We must bear sickness and all it brings with it," she would say to Mère St-Joseph. "This last illness," adds the narrator, "was peculiarly painful and distressing; its variations kept the Sisters wavering between hope and fear. The invalid alone never varied, and it was impossible to know whether she preferred to recover or to die. Entirely devoted as she was to the Institute, identified in a manner with the work entrusted to her by God, I think that she would not have refused to re-engage in the com-

**Proc. infor.*, xxi. p. 248.

†*Memoirs*, Vol. iv; *Proc. infor.* viii. *de heroica Spe*, p. 100.

bat; on the other hand, she felt that to be delivered from the body of this death and to be with Christ was for her a thing by far the better. I shall never forget the look in her eyes a few days before her last illness as, raising them to heaven, she cried out: 'O my God, how happy a soul must feel when she lays down this burden of the body!'"* It seemed as if the old days of Cuvilly and Compiègne had come back; indeed, she had asked of God that, if she might no longer work for Him, He would give her back the sufferings of her youth. She lay in a state of complete powerlessness and annihilation, often of sharp pain, offering herself continually as a victim of God's good pleasure. She rarely spoke now; only when her daughters wept around her she would say, "Courage, my children! do not be frightened. God will never fail you;" and to those who compassionated her sufferings she would answer with the familiar refrain: "God is our good Father. He is good—infinitely good—the good God!" Once Sister Eulalie expressed her distress at seeing her growing daily weaker. "My dear child," said Julie, "I am so glad to see the destruction of my nature in homage to its Creator." Then, with an ineffable smile: "Heaven! I am going to heaven!" No desire, no fear, no anxiety, ever once ruffled her perfect tranquillity; "This ineffable peace," as

* *Memoirs*, iv. p. 7.

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Mère St-Joseph terms it, remained with her till her last breath, nor was it, as her friend is careful to point out, an apathy due to her illness, for she retained consciousness to the very end, but the fruit of God's grace and her own virtue. And she adds that though she herself is firmly convinced that the favours God then bestowed upon His Servant were something very special, yet, "had there been nothing else but her profound humility, her invincible patience, her unalterable calm, these were amply sufficient for the edification of those who nursed her or visited her. They were never weary of admiring the peace of her soul, and her immense confidence in the goodness of God, which was its source." The Blessed Mother herself, meanwhile, was penetrated with the sense of her nothingness. "God is taking me out of the world," she would say, "because I am not worthy to carry on his work."* She was fully persuaded that her death would be no loss whatever to the Institute, but that God would continue to sustain a society of which He alone was the Author. It was not worth while, she said, to trouble about a poor ignorant peasant like herself. And it is characteristic that she abstained from giving any special advice to her children. She had been wont to say: "True Sisters of Notre-Dame are victims ever living and dying—ever living by the

* Testimony of M. Renson, her confessor.

fire of love and of zeal for God's glory; ever dying by the continual immolation of themselves to God." Verily this life-in-death, this death-in-life, was hers to the end. Her great weakness, joined to the shocks and emotions of the last years, had occasioned a general contraction of the organs of nutrition; the stomach was unable to retain the lightest food, and the muscles of the neck became so hard and rigid that at times it seemed as if she must choke. But her prayer was rapt and increasing; one witness testifies to the bursts of the love of God which used to seize her before her death. The silent hours were filled with one long meditation on the Passion of Christ, and the throes of her own pain could never blunt her sensibility to His.

Her hands constantly clasped the crucifix and pressed it to her heart, while the tears streamed down her cheeks as she gazed upon it. Indeed, in order to obey the doctor, who had ordered rest, she was sometimes obliged to turn away her eyes from the sacred image, being unable to bear the sight of Jesus crucified without bursting into tears and sobs.* She had always been thus sensibly affected by the Passion. Her eyes filled the moment she fixed her mind upon it in meditation. "What!" she would say, "a God reduced to that

* *Proc. Infor. Summarium*, p. 242. Also depositions of witnesses, xvii, and xxix.

condition for us miserable sinners!" She never made the Stations of the Cross dry-eyed, and one of the witnesses for the Cause—an old family servant of Mme. Goëthals of Courtrai, tells how one day she had surprised Mère Julie bathed in tears before the ninth station. "One would have thought," she said, "that Mère Julie was weeping for the sins of the whole human race."* When she fell ill, she had been carried to the bed of Mère St-Joseph, her own little room having no fireplace.

"I had in my room [says the author of the *Memoirs*] rather a fine painting of the Taking down from the Cross; and as her eyes often rested upon it, she said to me: 'I beseech you, child, take away that picture; I suffer too much when I see it.'†

"The least sound was torture to her [we still quote from the *Memoirs*], and she could scarcely bear to be spoken to; but I used often to read her a few lines of the *Following of Christ*. One day as I was preparing to do so she stretched out her hand and, without looking at the book, laid her finger on a verse which she could not possibly see, and said: 'That is the part you must read.' It was this passage: 'If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy

* *Responsio ad animadversiones Promotoris Fidei*, cap. iii de *Obstaculis*.

† *Memoirs*, vol. iv. p. 31.

desired end, to that place where there will be an end to suffering, though here there will be no end.' * To obtain the cure of the Superior-General, Masses, Communion, prayers and penances were continually offered up; large alms were given for this intention; the priests of the different churches begged the prayers of their flocks, the pupils in the schools joined their supplications to those of their teachers in order to obtain the prolongation of so precious a life. As the feast of St. Joseph was approaching, his intercession was particularly implored. Our Mother knew this, and said to me one day, 'You must promise to clothe three poor little girls in honour of St-Joseph.' 'Yes, ma Mère,' I replied, 'we will do so if he gets us what we are asking him for.' 'Oh! in any case he will do something; go quickly, and promise him that you will do so; promise it at the foot of our Lady's altar.' We promised [adds Mère Blin], and St-Joseph did indeed do something; he obtained for her a happy and peaceful death." †

As soon as she had felt the first attacks of her illness, knowing that complaints and accusations against her had been carried to the bishop in connection with the affairs related in the last chapter, she called Mère St-Joseph, and said to

* *Imit.*, book ii., chap. xii., v. 5.

† *Memoirs*, v, p. 11.

her: "One may sometimes commit many faults without knowing it. Go then, and ask Monseigneur's pardon for me." She went, but the prelate, who was himself too ill to visit Julie, answered: "Why, what has she done? All I have to reproach her with is neglect of her health; she has killed herself." Now, "with great tenderness and humility" she asked pardon also of her Assistant for any pain she might have caused her, "though," adds the latter, "she had never really given me any."

Up to nearly the end of March this well-beloved "eldest daughter" had nursed her with the most untiring devotion; but God, Who in death as in life, was fashioning her to the likeness of the Crucified, now took from her this last human comfort. Worn out by fatigue, Mère St-Joseph was in her turn attacked by an epidemic fever complicated with pleurisy. In a few days her state became most alarming; Extreme Unction was administered; on one and the same day the Holy Viaticum was borne to each of the dying Foundresses; and for a moment it seemed that these two, so closely knit together in life, even in death would not be divided. But God heard the prayers of the grief-stricken community; M. Minsart, coming once to visit the two Superiors, to whom he was greatly attached, made this prediction: "Mère Julie will die, but Mère St-Joseph will be restored to the Congregation." And so it happened; Mère

St-Joseph recovered from the attack, but so slowly that at the death of Julie she was not yet out of danger. Many of the clergy came to visit the Servant of God; the poor, whom she had loved so well, flocked to enquire after her, and prayed fervently for her recovery; and the elder pupils of the boarding-school earnestly besought the favour of being allowed to receive a last blessing from their beloved Mother. For each of these last she had a word of wise counsel. "Palmyre," she said to one of them, "be faithful to the Cross; it will take you to heaven." The prediction was verified; in the heavy trials which fell to her lot, Charlotte-Palmyre Dayeneux found sanctification and merit.* Having heard that one of the children of the Poor School, Thérèse Tasset, who filled the post of errand-girl to the community, was broken-hearted at the thought of never seeing her again, Julie sent for her to her bedside, comforted her with extreme kindness, and gave her her blessing. "Courage, my little Thérèse," she said in the old kind way; "you are the friend of the good God, and He is so good!" The child left her with a great joy in her heart.† On April 2 she sent this message to the teachers of the different classes: "Tell your little girls that I bless them with all my heart; tell

* *Proc. Infor. Summ.*, xxi.

† *Proc. Apost. de fama*. Inter. xxxi. 5th witness.

them to remember the good God in every circumstance of their lives, and to seek first in all things what will make their salvation secure; the rest shall be added to them."

In spite of her weakness, Mère St-Joseph sometimes had herself carried in an arm-chair to the room where her venerated Mother lay dying; but sorrow and prostration hung their weight upon her own lips, and humility as well as pain seemed to seal those of the Servant of God—they spoke little. On April 6 Julie saw that tears stood in her daughter's eyes. "St-Joseph, St-Joseph," she said with affectionate familiarity, "where is your confidence gone to?" In vain the poor Mother tried to master her emotion; unable to suppress her tears, she left the room abruptly, without any of her usual expressions of respectful tenderness. On the following evening at about five or six o'clock, though very feverish, she again had herself wheeled to the bedside of Julie, who, lifting up her finger in gentle reproach, said to her, "The good God was not pleased yesterday," meaning that, as Superior, she should have controlled her emotion in presence of the Sisters. "It was in this way," continues the Co-foundress, "that this dear Mother of mine pointed out my failings to me—many and many a time has she said the same words. Then she spoke again: 'Sister St-Joseph, will you come back again

this evening?' 'No,' I answered, 'my fever is too high.' She said no more, and I kissed her; when I saw her again she was dead." One feels the tears in the last sentence. But it was well so: had Françoise Blin de Bourdon been by to receive Julie Billiard's last breath, there would have been a jar of incompleteness. "Naked," Julie was to "follow her naked Jesus," that she might "live to Him eternally." *

Nothing could be simpler than that death. Very few even of the Sisters were present at it, for many had been struck down with the prevailing epidemic, and most of the others, occupied all day with the care of the sick or other laborious offices, had been obliged by obedience to take some rest. The dying saint made no external demonstrations; her only request was that she might be buried like a poor person and the least of the Sisters. Then, that she might die stripped of all things, she took a little reliquary which she wore, and gave it to Sister Eulalie. Palm Sunday was drawing to a close. All at once the feeble voice began to sing very softly and gently her favourite *Magnificat*—to those who listened it seemed as though in the long silent hours she had been recalling all the graces of her life. Soon after, towards eight o'clock in the evening, she lost the use of speech; and we think that no other

* *Imit. Xti.*, Bk. III, xxxvii.

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words could have more beautifully closed the song of praise which Julie Billiard's whole story had been than that canticle of humility and joy in God. Canon Renson was called, and passed the night by her bedside with the infirmarian and two or three other Sisters. On April 8, at two o'clock in the morning, she passed away so peacefully that no one could tell the exact moment of her death, and a mirror was held to her lips to make sure that she had ceased to breathe. It was Monday in Holy Week; the shadow of the crucifix rested upon her death even as it had lain upon her life.

This "blessed death of our dear Mother," as she terms it in a letter written the day after to Sister Marie Steenhaut, was to Mère St-Joseph a terrible blow, and left in her soul a void which God alone could fill. Though her own state made her unfit to move, she insisted on going back to look once more on the face of her friend and guide; "then," she tells us "the features which had been so altered by suffering when we parted, had recovered their usual expression, and the look of pain had given place to a smile."* Beside that body, the tears she shed had nothing of bitterness or discouragement, for through them she looked to the Heaven where she could not but feel that her beloved Mother had become her powerful protectress, and "where," as she said,

* *Memoirs*, vol. iv, p. 19.

"she could see better the needs of her children and win for them more abundant help." The deceased, clothed in her religious habit, was laid out in the room where she had died, on a poor bed, beside which on a little table stood a crucifix between two lighted candles. Around the body knelt the Sisters, at once invoking with the utmost confidence the intercession of her who had so often strengthened them in weakness and consoled them in trouble. Her limbs remained flexible, the tints of health returned to her cheek, and her lips were parted with a smile whose beauty struck all beholders—the smile of a child who dies with eyes fixed upon its Father's face. She looked full of life, and on fire with the love of God.*

One of those who prepared the holy body for the grave—Sister Emmanuelle Bonnay, who died at Visé in 1861—had so high an opinion of Julie's sanctity that she used to say: "Our dear Mère Julie will be canonised some day; I shall not see it, but others will." All the letters and documents in which different Sisters have recorded details of her end bespeak the same conviction of her holiness and her beatitude. In a letter addressed to the community of Montdidier† and dated April 22, 1816, we read:

* *Summ.* xxi.

† The house at Montdidier was not finally suppressed till a few months later, June, 1816.

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"As to the details you ask for concerning her death, I cannot find words to express the faith and love which animated our dying Mother. Her most painful illness of three months was borne with the most absolute resignation, and, as you already know, she gave up her soul to her Creator on the eighth of this month. How true it is that the death of the just is like the evening of a beautiful day! There was something heavenly in her countenance, and a certain rosy colour remained in it after death. Her holy life gives us a confident hope that she now enjoys the repose promised to those who walk in the footsteps of their crucified Lord. She had had gall and vinegar given her to drink, and had, as you know, in divers ways, drained His chalice to the dregs. We trust that she has gone to rest from her sufferings and toils." *

In the *Annals* of the Institute Sister Stéphanie furnishes the following details. After relating the peaceful agony and death of the Servant of God, she adds:

"When our Mother had expired, her face instantly lost all trace of pain: she seemed to smile.

* The original of this letter was found at Compiègne in 1891, and sent by Canon de Maindreville, curé of the Church of St. Antoine, to the Rev. Mother-General at Namur, where it was authenticated by the Bishop, Mgr. Bélin, on the fifth of October of the same year.

Canon Renson had not left her since the evening before; he and a few Sisters were present at her last breath; but, in her humility, she would not have the community gathered together, nor did she make any of those outward demonstrations which some saintly persons have considered profitable. . . . She had always kept very secret the gifts of God to her soul; she did so to the last. . . . The Sisters embraced their Mother, covering her dead body with their tears. But there was no bitterness in their regrets, for they well knew she was not lost to the Institute she had so much loved; on the contrary we hoped that, being now nearer to the source of all graces, she would obtain a greater abundance of them for her work. If indeed our hearts had not been filled with this confidence that she would sustain the Institute by her credit with God, we might have feared the total ruin of the Congregation.

“As soon as our loss became known in the town, many pious persons, who could not obtain the privilege of seeing the holy remains because the public were not admitted, sent rosaries and medals to touch the body, and begged for pieces of her clothing or of anything which the Servant of God had used. Each Sister had the consolation of receiving some fragments of her garments, and we wear them with the same sentiments of veneration and of confidence which we bore her in life.”

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It had been decided that the townspeople should not be indiscriminately admitted to venerate the mortal remains of the Servant of God, but that this favour should be granted only to the clergy, the friends of the house, the pupils and their parents. But it was impossible to keep to this regulation; the crowd was so numerous, that, as we learn from the letter to Montdidier already quoted, the great gate of the Rue des Fossés had to be thrown open in order to satisfy their devotion. Some of the pupils of those days, who now reckon among the most precious memories of their childhood that of having venerated the remains of Julie Billiart, appeared as witnesses in the Juridical Process. One venerable old lady, Mme. Nihotte, said: "I have often seen Mère Julie; she was greatly beloved by the children on account of her kindness. . . . At the time of her death I was a day-scholar at the convent; we all went to see her, and to kiss her feet. Many people, too, from the town came to venerate her mortal remains. She was not changed by death: I can still see her features, bright and fresh-coloured as if she had been alive; people said to each other: 'She is a Saint. See! her features are not altered.'" *

Félicie Minet stated: "I saw Reverend Mère Julie Billiart after her death. I remember distinctly

* Fol. 608.

that the children touched her body with their rosaries. Her reputation for holiness was very great, and every one in the town was talking of the good she had done." *

Other witnesses recalled their impressions in similar terms. In fact there is no more glorious testimony to the memory of the Blessed Servant of God than that given under oath at the various "Processes" by her former pupils. One mentions her faith, her trust in God, her love for the poor; another her amiability and wonderful kindness; a third her boundless charity. Mme. de Bernard de Fauconval, whose tender reminiscences of Gembloux and Sister Gertrude the reader will not have forgotten, tells of her ecstasies, her visions, her miraculous cure, and dwells on the firmness of her rule, her vigilance, and the reputation for holiness which she enjoyed. To this last fact a chorus of voices testify. "Mère Julie," says Mme. de Saegher, "was loved and venerated *as a Saint*." "She was a Saint, and a great Saint," writes Mme. Dety; "but it is a pity she went to heaven so much too soon!" And Mme. Aubron, whose delight it was to relate to her own little girl stories of the days when she had lived under Julie's care at the Pensionnat of Namur, used to say: "My child, Mère Julie had reached such a height of holiness that I have no words to express the virtues we

* Fol. 409.

remarked in her. All in Mère Julie was holy; but all was simple, humble, pure, charitable, pious. She was a very reflection of God."

On hearing the news of the death of the Foundress Mgr. Pisani, though seventy-three years of age and extremely ill at the time, wrote the following letter to Sister Eulalie:

"My dear Child in Christ,—I heard with the deepest sorrow of the fatal stroke which has thus separated you for a time from your estimable and holy Mother, Sister Julie. This is the moment for showing heroic courage and resolution, full and entire submission to the decrees of God, always just even when severe. Tell all your Sisters and pupils how much I am concerned for their affliction; what adds to my own is that I am still unable to go and see you on account of my weak health, and a long and troublesome cold which I am trying to get rid of before the ceremonies of Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday. However, I am sure that my Vicar-General, Monsieur Médard, will have gone to console and strengthen you in this difficult crisis. May God preserve Mère St-Joseph to us; I am afraid she will sink under this terrible blow, but I trust that God will take pity on your community, which is so useful and fervent, and will leave us that good Mother. I have no doubt that Canon Renson assisted Mère Julie in

her last moments; it was a source of great regret to me not to have been able to see her and be edified by her virtue during her illness. I had several times offered the Holy Sacrifice for her recovery, knowing how necessary she was to your work. God did not hear my prayers; may His Holy Name be ever blessed and His paternal will accomplished!

"I am, my dear child, entirely devoted to you and your Sisters in union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

"✠ C-F-I., BISHOP OF NAMUR."

M. Médard, the Vicar-General, redoubled his kindness to the community in their great sorrow. On the very day of their Mother's death he gathered the Sisters together and spoke her praise in words which must have made their hearts burn. He had never known, he said to them, so pure a soul; he was certain she had already passed to the vision of God.

On account of the offices of Holy Week the funeral of the Foundress had to be hastened; it took place on Wednesday, April 10. Mère Julie's express wish, as we have seen, was that she should be buried simply, like the other Sisters, but the Bishop would not hear of complying with this humble request. He even went so far as to undertake the expense of a walled vault, over which he

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placed later a tombstone with an epitaph. The Blessed Servant of God was therefore interred with great solemnity; but the most touching pomp of her funeral was the long file of pupils and Sisters who followed their Mother and their Foundress to her last resting-place. This touching cortège numbered over four hundred, and made a great impression on the public. Besides these, a large number of persons assisted at the interment: the church was crowded, and during the solemn Requiem, in which many ecclesiastics took part, several Masses were going on at the side altars.

The obsequies took place in the Church of St. Joseph, to which parish the community belonged. As soon as the funeral set out, all the bells tolled; the shops were closed along its route, and the circuit of the town was made to satisfy the devotion of the people. Every child in the long procession carried a lighted taper. In a letter sent to Montdidier we read:

“The whole population, as well as the Sisters and children, followed the funeral to the grave, a thing not customary in this country, but granted to us by the civil authorities. Our ecclesiastical Superior, a venerable old priest of saintly life, followed the coffin accompanied by eighteen young men bearing torches.”

The body of Blessed Julie was interred in the common cemetery of the town; it was fitly laid close to the great Calvary which, later on, was destroyed when the cemetery was transferred to another locality in the interests of public health. More than one person accidentally passing through Namur between the 8th and 10th of April, 1816, has testified to hearing in the streets exclamations of "The Saint is dead! The Saint is dead! We have lost a Saint!" In other places also witness was borne to her sanctity. At Montdidier, where she was well known, the greatest sympathy was shown for the Sisters in their sorrow; the parish priest announced her death to his flock in words which showed the esteem in which she was held. "We recommend to your prayers Mère Julie, Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, who died at Namur on the 8th of this month in the odour of sanctity, after a life consecrated to the glory of God and the service of her neighbour. Her Sisters are inconsolable for her loss, and their tears are her highest praise. Although St. Augustine says that to pray for the Saints is to do them a wrong, still, faithful to the decrees of the Sovereign Pontiffs, who wish us to pray for those who die within the pale of the Church, and not to cease praying for them, however firm may be our belief that they are in the bliss of Heaven, until the Church has pronounced her verdict, and inserted

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their names in the catalogue of the Saints, faithful to this rule, I say, I shall sing the *Libera* after this Mass, and on Friday at the accustomed hour shall offer the Holy Sacrifice for the venerated deceased, whose death, there can be no doubt, was precious in the sight of God."

As soon as Mère St-Joseph had recovered, Monseigneur Pisani hastened to visit the community. "Mère Julie," he said, "was one of those souls who do more for the Church in a few years than hundreds of others, good though they may be, without her apostolic spirit, can do in a century. You will behold her in Heaven with the triple crown of a virgin, an apostle and a martyr. Her reward is great because she did much for God."

Among the letters of condolence which were addressed to her, Mère Blinde Bourdon preserved three on account of their special value: the first is from Monseigneur Demandolx, Bishop of Amiens:

"It would be impossible to say, Reverend Mother, how much I was affected by the immense loss you have sustained through the death of your good Mère Julie. You know what my sentiments were towards her, and what a high opinion I had of her virtue. She is gone to receive the reward of her fidelity, and I could not allow myself to regret for an instant the happiness she is enjoying in Heaven. Her patience and resignation in her

last illness formed the crowning act of her sacrifice. Let us always keep her example before our eyes as an encouragement to us in the trials we may have to endure. I know I am speaking to Sister Blin, to Sister St-Joseph, to the true friend of Sister Julie. Remember that you take her place in my sentiments towards her, and that I still have for your Congregation the same attachment I expressed to her. I hope that you continue on the same good terms with your venerable Bishop. Present my respectful compliments to him, and never doubt of my kindly feelings toward you.

“✠ J-F., BISHOP OF AMIENS.

“Amiens, May 3, 1816.”

Père Thomas wrote on May 6, 1816:

“I heard at the same time of our good Mère Julie's death and of your illness, and I am certain that her loss affects you more than your own danger. However good those who remain in a community may be, it is exceedingly difficult to fill the place of a Superior of such merit as hers when God has taken her to Himself. I am uniting my prayers with yours most heartily for the soul of our good Mother, although her singular virtues give us reason to hope that she is with God. I should blame myself if I lost sight of the important services she rendered me in the stormy period we passed through together. I always considered

her a good counsellor and never repented following any advice she was kind enough to give me. I know nobody to whom I am under greater obligations, and I am praying to God with all my heart to reward her for my sake and that of so many others who were helped by her wise counsels."

On May 8, 1816, Père Varin wrote from Paris to Mère St-Joseph:

"What a blow our Lord has struck, dear Rev. Mother, in taking from us our good Mère Julie! But how adorable are His designs! He had given her to your little Society in a manner which showed His power and His goodness. He has recalled her to Himself now, when she has fulfilled all the purposes He had in view. I am persuaded that the work of which she was the instrument in God's hands, far from suffering from her loss, will receive renewed prosperity by her intercession; for who can fail to have recourse to her prayers? If they had such power over the Heart of God while she was in the place of her exile, how much more must they have now that she is in the heavenly country, in the bosom of her God! Could we, in fact, think otherwise of that good Mother, than that she who on earth lived for love alone, must be destined to love God for all eternity? This ought to be for you, dear Mother, who take her place, a motive of consolation and confidence.

Yes, she will be more useful to you in heaven than on earth; she will give you palpable proofs of her credit with God; she will obtain for you the lights and graces of which you stand in need for the confirmation and extension of the Lord's work; and all your children will join you in acknowledging that their good Mother is a powerful protectress. Convey my good wishes to your community, and accept the assurance of the respectful and invariable attachment of your devoted servant."

Two years after the death of the Blessed Mère Julie, March 2, 1818, Père Varin wrote again to Mère St-Joseph, now Superior-General of the Institute:

"It is a real consolation for me to hear news of you and your numerous community. The memory of its early days has made it so dear to me that it never leaves my heart and mind; I offer it every day to the Eternal Father in union with His Divine Son in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I must mention a thought which constantly occurs to me. Have you not collected the details of the life of our good Mère Julie? I obliged her in the early days of your Society to write some memoirs of her life; she began, in spite of her dislike for the task, but did she either continue or keep

what she had written? I have strong doubts about it. However that may be, it seems desirable that some one should gather together all that was most remarkable in her life and most fitted to excite admiration for the mercies of our Lord over that holy soul. Do me the favour of telling me what you think about this; it seems to me that for the glory of God and the good of your Society it is proper to preserve the memory of your Mother and of the particular graces bestowed upon her. Although I am unknown to the greater number of your Sisters, they are not less dear to me; so pray assure them of my sincere good wishes, and believe always in the perfect and respectful attachment of your ever humble and obedient servant,

“VARIN, S.J.”

It was in response to the desire of Father Varin that Mère Blin de Bourdon wrote the *Memoirs* which have been so freely made use of in this Life.

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Let us cast one glance back over this existence—so simple, and withal so wonderful; the early childish apostolate, the long hidden life of suffering and inaction, the cure from the Heart of Jesus, the cruel persecution, the Institute verily built up on nothing, the solitary deathbed with its jubilant

Magnificat; and over all, permeating all, harmonising all, the shadow of the Cross—say, rather, of the Crucified—in vision and in truth; and the whole air filled from end to end with that refrain ever bubbling up from her great trustful heart, that her good God was so good.

Mirabilis Deus in Sanctis suis!

CHAPTER XX

The Character of Mère Julie

THERE are some Saints in whom, if we may so say, the contours of natural temperament and of character seem to be effaced,—lost in the radiance of their supernatural sanctity. With others, on the contrary, the personal physiognomy stands out clear-cut to the end—glorified, transfigured, it may be, by their holiness, but also, surely, giving to that holiness itself a special definiteness and charm. Julie Billiart belongs to the latter company; we know her, as we know Francis of Assisi, or Theresa of Jesus, or Philip Neri, or Catherine of Siena.

Throughout this biography we have earnestly desired that she should live again for the reader, and, therefore, at the risk of a less systematized presentation, have drawn so largely from her own writings and from the testimonies of those who knew her. It is time now to set before ourselves, in something of a consistent whole, the Woman and the Saint, the complete portrait of that beautiful soul as it was fashioned by nature and grace together.



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But, before doing so, we may try for a few moments to call up again the human countenance and the outward person of the Servant of God as they have been made known to us by tradition and by her pictures. Slightly below the middle height, her erect pose and the simple dignity of her carriage gave the impression of a taller person. Her movements, naturally brisk and active, were regulated by the most perfect modesty, her manner was easy and unconstrained. Canon Pirsoul, of Namur, who knew her well, gives the following interesting description of her: "Mère Julie sparkled with intelligence. Her conversation, through which played occasional flashes of real humour, never wearied one. Her character had all the vivacity of a Frenchwoman; and this, joined to the simplicity and frank cordiality of her manner, rendered intercourse with her delightful."

Père Vercruysse, S.J., furnishes other details. "I remember hearing that when she had to stop at a certain hotel in Lille she sometimes asked to have her meal served separately, but the landlord would often answer her: 'No, no, Mère Julie, you must dine at the table-d'hôte, and then you will have nothing to pay; my customers will be delighted to have the advantage of your presence and your conversation.' In fact, the latter would often propose some religious diffi-

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culties to her, just for the sake of hearing her clever answers to their objections. Her explanations were clear and interesting, her repartee always to the point and often extremely piquant and witty, so that these men of the world, soldiers and business men, used to be at once astonished and charmed. Especially striking were the perfect correctness and admirable wisdom with which she refuted their arguments against religion. 'Who would ever have suspected,' exclaimed her listeners in astonishment, 'such lofty language from a woman of such a simple appearance?'"

The most authentic of her portraits now hangs in the convent at Gembloux. It shows a countenance such as Mère St-Joseph describes her to have worn at the age of fifty, "intelligent and full of expression"; the eyes clear, deep and penetrating; the features regular; the lips firm-set but wearing their irresistible smile; a countenance which, without being what men call beautiful, has about it a wonderful charm.

A tradition attaches to this portrait which we may mention in passing. One Lent two Sisters let fall some complaints at the meagre portions served for collation; suddenly they were alarmed by a noise in the direction of the picture, and looking saw it turn of itself right round while a voice came from it saying: "Murmurers! do you call yourselves daughters of mine?"

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But on the living face shone a light which the painter cannot give—the angelic purity which, say the Acts of the Process, made her “seem rather an angel than a woman,” and which had won for her the privilege granted to some of the Saints of purifying the hearts of those who came near her. More than one, whose conscience was sullied by sin, has confessed to having been unable to meet the virginal purity of her gaze, which pierced them to the quick.

Two words, perhaps, may sum up the natural character of Julie Billiard—strength and tenderness. Her strength and courage struck all who had to do with her. Mgr. de Broglie described her as having “the head of a man on the shoulders of a woman,” and his successor, Mgr. Delebecque, used to say that he had never met with so much fortitude in a woman, and that she was, to his mind, “the valiant woman” by excellence. To fear difficulty or danger, to shrink from hardships or fatigue, were things impossible to her. The single fact that between the years 1806 and 1816, she made over one hundred and twenty journeys, many of them—as from Amiens to Bordeaux and Namur—extremely long, performed often in the most inclement weather and always under travelling conditions which, in these days of easy and luxurious locomotion, we can hardly realize, is sufficient testimony to her

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courageous enterprise and endurance. And it must be remembered that this series of journeys began when she was already fifty-five years of age. In many of them, as we have seen, she was exposed to real danger. Returning from Jumet on one occasion, she was arrested as a spy by a drunken gendarme and carried before the Mayor of Fleurus. A letter from the Archbishop of Bordeaux, which she happened to have upon her, fortunately established her true character and set her at liberty. Julie showed not the slightest flurry during this disagreeable incident, which, Frenchwoman as she was, constituted for her at that time a serious risk.

Her bright courage gave heart to others. Many an amusing story of these primitive journeyings has come down to us from the lips of the heroines of them. Thus, Sister Anastasie would relate that, travelling one day with her Mother in the Ardennes, she was on the point of falling at every step of the rough and steep path, and despaired of keeping up to the end. "Daughter," said Julie, "tie your little bundle on your head. You will balance yourself more easily if your hands are free." To Sister Angèle, who was in momentary terror of tumbling into the frozen pond along which they walked for a long way between Amiens and Rainneville, she held out a stick which she carried, and making her take hold of

the end of it helped her along thus. If her companion pitied her, she would answer joyously: "It is nothing, daughter. The good God gave me back my legs that I might use them for His glory."

"One day," says Sister Colette, "we had travelled a long way without breaking our fast. At last I ventured to say: 'Oh! *ma Mère*, I am so hungry!' Mère Julie, who was often deep in meditation as she walked along, turned a sorrowful glance upon me and said: 'Ah! my daughter Colette, the cause of God and the interests of His glory, these are the food of the Saints,' and she went on. After about ten minutes she gave me some breakfast, but took nothing herself."

Julie was never so gay as under the sufferings and privations entailed by the establishment of her first convents. At the foundation of the house at Zèle, it was found, when the dinner-hour arrived, that there was nothing to eat. Mère Julie at once began to sing a hymn and then to tell amusing anecdotes. So the hour passed away happily, and the Sisters, say the narrators, were as pleased as if they had made a good meal.

Her power of self-control, which shone forth so wonderfully during the terrible anxieties of the war, never belied itself in circumstances little or great; a fact doubly remarkable in one whose nervous system was so highly strung. Often,

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during her nights of insomnia, she would get up and walk under the poplar trees in the court, but half-past five in the morning saw her on her knees at meditation calm and motionless. Once, at table, a bad egg was served to her. Julie ate it without wincing till Mère St-Joseph, warned by the fetid odour, bent over and said: "*Ma Mère*, perform an act of obedience by allowing that egg to be taken from you; I cannot stand the smell of it." None of her children guessed at the bitter anguish which her broken heart carried about in her last years. They learnt it after her death from Mère St-Joseph and Sister Anastasie; but, say these two, "that smile of hers, calm as an anticipated radiation of the Beatific Vision, made the Sisters think that our Mother's sky was unflecked by any cloud."

In the training of her daughters her hand was firm as her eye was sure, and she asked much where character and virtue were strongly tempered. A Superior who had come to make her retreat at the Mother-House was found to have a nightgown which, though common enough as to the material, had been edged with a frill. After night prayers Julie summoned the delinquent and, having severely admonished her, burnt the unfortunate garment in presence of the assembled community, reciting meanwhile the *Miserere* with extended arms and with tears in her eyes.

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The saintly Sister Jeanne Godelle, when Superior at Zèle, had once allowed a Sister to go into the house of the Curé, where she had accepted some refreshment. Mère Julie on hearing of this infraction of the Rule, sent for her and put her straight back into the noviceship, without a word as to how she intended finally to dispose of her. Sister Jeanne rejoiced in her humiliation and the Servant of God restored her to her community after three weeks.

A certain novice was about to take her vows. Mère Julie met her one day, and wishing to put her obedience to the test, bade her lock up a room which she had just been cleaning out, put the key in her pocket and not give it up to any one. A moment after she sent the Mistress of Novices to ask for the key, and Sister A., not venturing to refuse her mistress, delivered it without mentioning the prohibition of the General. "Daughter," said the latter when she heard of it, "you shall make your vows when you have learnt to obey." And the novice's profession was put off.

She had a special gift for forming souls to blind and heroic obedience, and all the first Sisters were models of this virtue. "Our Superior is our living Christ," they would repeat in their old age to the younger members, "so our Mère Julie said." And if beginners feared failure in their functions on account of their incapacity, they would say to

them: "Courage! Obedience works miracles. Mère Julie used to say that the Sisters of Notre-Dame should know that they are good for nothing and capable of everything according as holy Obedience sets them aside or employs them."

"Recommend obedience very strongly to my dear daughters," wrote the Foundress to a local Superior, "without it they will never be children of the good God, nor mine."

As we have seen, all her conferences and letters breathe strong doctrine.

"Masculine courage and firm confidence in God, these are the arms of a Sister of Notre-Dame. With these she may overthrow all the devils of hell and face the most cruel tyrants of earth."

Again:—"The Institute of Notre-Dame must be composed of valiant souls, of courageous and magnanimous hearts, of persons who never say 'it is enough' in the matter of perfection and apostolic devotedness. Only they who run win the prize; we must run to our last breath in the way of perfection, and wear ourselves out till death for the sake of the souls entrusted to us. We do not belong to ourselves, dear Sisters; religious perfection consists in the renunciation of all spirit of propriety, in a life stripped of all self-will, all self-seeking, in order to keep our eyes fixed only on the interests of our Lord. . . .

It is in meditation that the Sisters of Notre-Dame must learn the science of the spiritual crucifixion which the good God requires at the hands of souls called by Him to the sublime functions of the apostolate. Of a truth, the life of a Sister of Notre-Dame is no easy and comfortable life. It is modelled on that of our Lord, and must be a life of annihilation, of sacrifice, of crucifixion. Woe to the Sister of Notre-Dame who does not live by immolation, she ignores the very purpose of that Divine call which fixed its choice on her. . . . For a Sister of Notre-Dame there must be no question of caprice, of fancy, of inclination; she must be dead to all such things and live only the life of Jesus Crucified. Each day she should take one step forward to Calvary."

"Down with nature, up with grace!" Julie was fond of repeating, and she loved to set before her Sisters the example of the sons of St. Ignatius. "The Jesuits," she would say, "are men of great soul, who look not at what they have done but at what they have yet to do. Even so, our own Institute must be composed of virile souls and manly hearts, or it will crumble away like a house built upon quicksands."

How she rejoiced when she came across such souls, capable of understanding and responding to her teaching. We may note, among many, Constance Eloi, whom from the very day of her

admission, the Blessed Mother led by the way of complete mortification and absolute renunciation. When she took her to Ghent for her probation, she said to her: "My daughter, you shall be called Sister *Fidèle*; make yourself worthy to have said to you one day: 'Come, spouse of Jesus Christ;' because you have been faithful (*fidèle*) in the very least of your duties, enter into the joy of the Lord." The young religious kept these words in her heart, and they served her as a continual spur to perfection. After her death in 1835, her Superior, Sister Ignace Goëthals,* herself a person of uncommon sanctity, declared unhesitatingly that she had never known Sister Fidele transgress the slightest point of her rule.

There was no rigidity or harshness in Julie's strength and energy; she was strong as are God's winds and waters, which are also the gentlest and most caressing of His creatures. Mere St-Joseph bears witness to the prudence and patience she exercised with regard to souls which needed careful and delicate handling.

"She would say to me: 'It is not the time to touch such a one'; for another: 'We must wait awhile for her.' To others she spoke thus: 'As for you, it is God who must work in *your* soul;

* Third General of the Institute.

it is useless to press you before the time, it would only trouble you. I am not over-anxious about you, as the good God has taken upon Himself to admonish you; when the moment comes, He will make His Will known, and will help you to fulfil it.' She used to say to me: 'There are souls whom God guides, so to speak, by Himself, and who hardly need the help of men, save the general observance of the Rule, and of those things which belong to obedience, good order and prudence.'"

We have only to open at random the collection of her *Letters* to feel her large tenderness, her encompassing solicitude. How, in the midst of her incessant journeys and the cares of government, she accomplished so extensive and sustained a correspondence, is in itself wonderful. Not only for the local Superiors, but for the least and last of her Sisters, she has words of help and comfort in their troubles, little or great—words of interest in their doings—words, above all, of nourishment for their souls. All is sympathetic, personal.

Let us turn over some of these pages from Mère Julie's heart:

"Dear Sister Xavier is never out of my mind and heart. By all means let her come and recruit in her native air; but tell me first if she is fit to

travel alone. If I were free, how quickly would I fly off to fetch her, had I even to carry her on my back to restore her health to her."

"My dear Sister N., how good God is, is He not? And how are you getting on with all your *treasures*, as the dear saint whose feast we are keeping to-day, St. Lawrence, calls them? Like him, dear daughter, you have their keeping committed to you. What an honour God does you! I should have congratulated you on it long ago, if my journey had not hindered me. On my way back I called to see your aunts. Do you know whom I found with them? Your dear father, who was delighted at this unexpected meeting. He talked much about you, and I gave him news of you. I do hope you have written to your aunts; they are longing to hear from you. I need not ask you how you are, for I know well that you only wish the holy will of the good God, for time and eternity. Courage, dearest child; I recommend you from my heart to the good God."

"Well, well, my good Sister Rosalie, do you still bear me a grudge for having taken your good Sister Superior from you?*" Have a little patience, my daughter, God will give her back to you. Oh, dear Sister, how pleased God is when

* Mère St-Joseph, who had left Namur for Amiens.

we make little sacrifices for Him—He, who made so great a one for us. Offer up yours to Him with all your heart; believe me, it will please Him very much.”*

“So my dear daughter is tired of not seeing her Mother any more? What! do you doubt that she is still with you in mind and heart? Dear daughter, let us keep ourselves strongly riveted to the divine Centre of our hearts, the Heart of our dear Lord. Let us live on sacrifices, in union with that which He makes daily for us upon our altars. Meet me there, my daughter, like a poor turtle-dove, sighing over the abandonment in which this dear and adorable Master is left by His creatures. Pierce, with the eyes of faith, the wall which separates you from the chapel, and lay all our hearts there as victims of love.”†

No detail is too small for her interest; she writes to Sister Scholastique:

“I am so consoled to see that you are doing all you can to fulfil your duties well. Your writing has wonderfully improved, which shows that God blesses the little time you are able to give to practising it. Try now to get the spelling better too.”

* To the Sisters at Namur, August 10, 1808.

† To Sister Eulalie, Nov. 21, 1812.

And no time or trouble are too much where the spiritual good of a Sister is concerned. The following was written to a Sister of St-Hubert, December 9, 1815, just four months before her death:

"To come now to the question of fighting your over-sensitiveness. Ah! my dear daughter, that I will do with my pen quite as well as by word of mouth. Sometimes people dare not touch souls; as for me, when the good God shows me that I must not put on gloves, I push right through everything, for I know what a poor sort of religious that is for whom one must put on a pair of new gloves every time one speaks to her. Such a person will be a scandal to others all her life long; nay, I go further, and say that when one does not fight against this wretched sensibility of ours, which is part of the universal pride with which we are eaten up, one cannot have the veriest particle of love for God; we pass our whole life in working for our miserable selves. What confidence can we then have at the hour of death? What sort of a welcome can you expect from the good God—you, especially, who were called at the first hour of the day? My poor child, I have seen for a long time that you do not really work at your character enough to reach the point God meant you to reach. When He

calls souls so early, He has very special designs over them. . . . I believe that the real fact of the matter is that you dare not attack your miserable nature. But, my poor daughter, much good will that timidity do you for Heaven! Your character will never be formed if neither you, nor anyone else, must lay a finger on it. . . .

"My child, I am speaking to you in all the fullness of my heart. It is high time that you should set yourself seriously to the work; up to now you have only done the thing by halves. Your sensibility may cry for mercy as much as it likes, I shall not listen to it at all. . . . Believe me, my dear daughter, it is more than time to begin. I, personally, looked for greater efforts from you to become more interior, more mortified; I know that you do not correspond with grace as you ought. Oh! do not be satisfied with mediocrity in virtue; Our Lord wants to lead you to further heights. If, when He has got you there, it is time to stop, if there is any fear of your climbing too high, I shall tell you. But do say in all sincerity to the good God that, cost what it may, you will meet His merciful views in your regard, for His greater glory.

"There is an Advent sermon for you; take good care not to lose a single word of it. I believe it to be of the first importance for you; there is no more time for coddling our natural

sensibility—no, no, no, for others would outstrip us, and the moments from time to Eternity are so short!

“I leave you in these dispositions, my dear child. . . I am most devotedly yours; believe that I only have your greater good in view. Set to work, set to work.

“I have not yet dined, I have passed the dinner hour with you.”

How thoughtful was the Blessed Mother to give pleasure to her children whenever she could. Sister Ursula of Jesus used to tell a story of her own early days at Amiens. Young and rather lazy, she often went to bed before the others, especially in winter, on the slightest pretexts of health or fatigue. But Mère Julie said so much about surmounting little indispositions for the love of God, and impressed so often upon her that, in her favourite phrase, she must not be a *woman*, that the little Sister took a brave resolution never to listen to nature in this matter again. Julie saw the courageous efforts with joy and watched her health carefully. “One day,” said Sister Ursula, “I had a heavy cold. I said to myself, ‘I will pay no attention to it. I will offer this indisposition to God.’ But towards evening our Mother came to tell me to go early to bed. She had herself prepared some bread-and-milk

for me and put a hot water bottle in my bed."

Ursula was clever, but apparently not fond of study. One evening, on returning from a journey, Julie learned that she had retired to bed thoroughly discouraged by the difficulties of French Grammar, and roundly declaring that she would study it no more. The Servant of God at once sent for her to the Community Room, and spoke to her with great force on the sublimity of her vocation, on the obligation which rests on a Sister of Notre-Dame to apply herself to study, on the joy of wasting oneself in God's service. The tears stood in Julie's eyes; the good little Sister was deeply touched, asked pardon, and went back to bed. In the middle of the night, Julie paid her child a visit, and comforted and stimulated her so efficaciously that Ursula from that time loved her grammar, and turned out an excellent class-mistress.

In September, 1815, it happened that Sister Bernardine, first mistress of the boarding-school at Gembloux, was unable to pass her holidays at Namur, as she usually did, being detained by the care of a little pupil staying at the Convent for the vacation. "My mind and my heart will be at Namur," she wrote; "Gembloux will only have my body." At once Mère Julie replied: "My little Bernard, bring your body too, so that nothing

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may be wanting. As to your little baroness, let her come with you; we will try and amuse her at the Mother-House."

And now, what was the special note of sanctity grafted upon this character of which we have tried to seize the essential features? It would, of course, be possible to take up in succession the different virtues which shone forth in the life of the Servant of God, to illustrate her Humility, her Poverty, her Prudence, and so of the rest. But, apart from the fact that anything in the shape of systematized analysis seems singularly out of keeping with the large simplicity of her soul, such a dissection would not—so, at least, it seems to us—truthfully depict her. For when one tries to call up the Blessed Julie before one's eyes, it is not—as it undoubtedly is with many of the Saints—this or that virtue which starts up in connection with her. Rather it is the very atmosphere in which, all through her life, her soul lives with God, without mist or veil between them. Her holiness is just the first half of the *Pater*: from her earliest years she realizes her relation to God as a child to its Father, and, therefore, her life's chant, in word and deed, is *Adveniat regnum tuum, Fiat voluntas tua*. Seeing God as she did, walking with Him as she did, the rest follows—her magnificent Trust, her Joy, Poverty, Purity, Humility, all.

One word of her own expresses this attitude of her soul to God, these terms, if we may so say, on which she lived with Him. She called it Simplicity, and no words better than her own can explain what meaning that misused word carried for her:

"I think, my daughters, that simplicity is what Brother Giles once sang to another religious, 'One to One, one to One,' that is, one only soul to one only God."

Again:

"Simplicity is like that beautiful flower they call a sunflower, which follows all the movements of the sun, and ever turns itself towards it. Even so, the mind and heart of a religious who possesses this virtue are always turned towards God alone from Whom she receives the light which beautifies and which guides her, and the warmth which vivifies her."

"If we could see souls," she would say, "we could never see anything more beautiful than a simple soul at prayer. She talks to God with sweet familiarity as to her Father and her Spouse; she tells Him her faults with candour, and asks His pardon; then she listens to Our Lord Who communicates Himself to simple souls. He tells

her His secrets—He can no more keep back His secrets from a simple soul than He could from Abraham. . . . This holy familiarity of a simple soul with her God diminishes neither reverence, nor wonder, nor filial fear; on the contrary, none more than the simple soul so sweetly united to God fears to sadden the Heart of our divine Master."

Finally: "St. Ignatius, Founder of the Society of Jesus, possessed true and holy simplicity, for he sought but one thing, 'the greater glory of God,' and, for himself, to be by the world forgotten and despised. These are the things which a good Sister of Notre-Dame should desire and seek." And so the ardent Sister Stèphanie, proverbial among the first Sisters for her love of souls, used to beg: "Pray for me, and get for me from God a true spirit of simplicity; for our Mère Julie said that the simplest soul was the most apostolic."

We have multiplied our extracts because Julie has painted herself in them. To empty her heart of all that is not God—the expression is her own—was her constant endeavour. Père Sellier, S.J., after speaking of the marvellous gift of prayer and the mysterious state of absorbed recollection in which she passed some hours every day during the years when she was nailed to her couch by paralysis, says:

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“To this spirit of prayer Mère Julie joined purity of heart in an uncommon degree; it could scarcely be otherwise, since the higher paths of prayer imply uninterrupted union with God, which is founded on and limited by purity of heart—that perfect purity which supposes entire detachment from self, from creatures, and from all that is not God. She would often exclaim with an intensity of feeling that baffles description: ‘O purity of heart! purity of heart!’ She wanted to have sacramental absolution several times in the day, but not being able to name any distinct voluntary fault, she could not find a confessor who would consent to listen to her so often. When asked why she was so anxious to approach the tribunal of penance, she would answer: ‘Ah, it is for the special grace of purification attached to the Sacrament, a grace which increases cleanness of heart.’”

Her soul leaped to Him as the steel to the magnet. It was the rarest possible thing, Mère St-Joseph tells us, for Julie to miss a Communion even when travelling.

“However out-of-the-way the place was, she displayed a wonderful zeal, skill and activity in procuring for herself the blessing of Holy Communion; she discovered means where others would only have seen obstacles. To me it is

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evident that God marvellously helped her to find the Object of her love." "I know not," the Servant of God used to say towards the end of her life, "I know not how I am able to wait for the moment of Holy Communion, so much do I suffer in body and in soul; but no sooner do I possess my Jesus than I feel refreshed."

The old Sisters used to say that when she sang hymns, "it was love singing love," and when they sat fireless in the cold winter evenings at Amiens, she would cry: "Come, my children, let us sing the praises of the Lord," and the fire of her soul communicating itself to theirs they felt the cold no longer. At Courtrai, where she was well known, the people were wont to call her *the walking love of God*.*

The good God, she would tell her Sisters, must be *the soul of their souls*, so that, as she often picturesquely put it, "nothing on earth ought to be simpler than the heart of a Sister of Notre-Dame, which should be like crystal—nay, simpler yet; for the crystal reflects all the colours of the rainbow, while the heart of a Sister of Notre-Dame should reflect nothing but God alone."

The whole life of the Servant of God is summed up in the words of the Amiens vision, "Look at Me and follow Me." If there was some difficult thing to be done, some perplexing question to be

* Testimony of Père Bruno Vercruysse, S.J.

solved, she did not say, "I will think about it—I will see," but "God will do it for me, God will show me"; she takes this or that decision after having "well thought it over with the good God."

Julie needed no effort to trust, she could not do otherwise. "I believe," writes Mère Blin de Bourdon, "that her confidence in Divine Providence was carried to an uncommon degree. When difficulties, embarrassments and complicated affairs seemed as if they must almost crush her, she went on hoping against hope like Abraham, and pouring all her anxieties into the heart of God. I can even say that I have seen her in the midst of the most trying events assume a more cheerful air than usual. She would say, 'I have nothing to do with all that; it is the good God's business, not mine.' Her resource in any specially difficult or knotty point was, not to spend her time reasoning or reflecting, but simply to ask God to show her His will. Although she was careful in all matters of business and took the advice of competent persons, it was in God alone that she put all her trust; many a time she has said to me, 'I may well place all my confidence in God, for I have seen so clearly the action of His Providence in a number of perplexing circumstances from which I could never have extricated myself alone. Whenever I am puzzled about anything, the good God comes to help me.

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I cannot, therefore, be troubled about such matters; you know I am not clever, God must do all.'"

She wrote to a Superior who was anxious about the future of her school:

"Let alone all those merely human views and take those of a lively faith, a faith in God. What a consolation it is to teach little children to know Him! and, having no desire but this, what can we fear? Let us do all the good God points out to us, moment by moment, wishing for nothing but what He shows us by His adorable Providence. My dear, good friend, hold fast the good God's hand, so that He may lead you, and that you may do all He wants. Leave yourself entirely on one side; be quite sure that by yourself you would, like me, make but a very poor piece of work of it. If we could, once for all, let the good God act, all would go better with us; let us try it in earnest, and do you ask this grace very fervently for me, who from morning till night do not know what I am going to do next."

Need we say that the good God dealt with her as she dealt with Him? The Bishop of Ghent used to say he was convinced that Mère Julie obtained from Our Lord whatever she wanted, and we have seen in the course of these

pages more than one instance of the power of her childlike *abandon*. We may add here two others. A Sister belonging to the Namur community was one day chopping wood when she let the axe fall upon her foot, wounding it very severely. The blood flowed profusely, and her companions ran in alarm to fetch the Servant of God. Julie traced the sign of the cross on the injured foot, and then said to the Sister: "No harm is done, my daughter; go back to your work. The good God knows you want your feet for His glory." No sooner had she spoken than the Sister rose perfectly cured; so thoroughly was the wound healed that not even a scar was visible.

Sister Gertrude Steenhaut was suffering great pain from a sort of excrescence which had formed on one knee, and which had attained an immense size. It was agony to her to kneel, and she went at last to declare the complaint to the Blessed Mother. "It is nothing at all, my child, nothing at all. Go quick to chapel, kneel down and say a prayer; the thing will pass away." Gertrude obeyed, and when she rose and examined her knee, all trace of swelling had disappeared.

On countless occasions, too, did God assist the action of His Servant by drawing aside the veil from the future, or by revealing to her the secrets of hearts. Once, as she was travelling with Sister Marie Quequet, the shadows of evening fell while

they had still far to go. Then Julie, seeing in the distance a country mansion, said confidently to her companion: "Daughter, go and ring at that house, and ask if they will kindly lodge two nuns and their donkey." The child of obedience did so without fear and without reflection, and the master of the house gladly gave them a liberal hospitality, and next morning took them in his own carriage to their destination.

A certain Superior, on giving in, according to custom, the annual accounts of her house, had entered as already spent a sum which, though due, had not yet been actually paid. Mère Julie looked over the books, expressed her satisfaction that they were in order, and the inaccuracy passed unnoticed. But a few days later, on coming out from Mass, she accosted the Sister: "Daughter, your accounts are not exact; I saw it this morning before God, just as you were going to Holy Communion." The Superior was stupefied, for she had not told any one what she had done.

In 1813, another Superior, alarmed at the threatening aspect of affairs, had become a prey to great agitation of spirit and harassing fears for the future of the Institute. She had confided her trouble to no one but a fellow-Superior, to whom she had written asking what course of action she intended taking in the event of public catastrophes. The recipient also had preserved

perfect secrecy. Holidays came. Julie went to the garden and sought out the poor Superior who was just at that moment in fresh anguish of mind, and after gazing at her very kindly for some moments in silence, said: "Child of little faith, why did you doubt? why are you doubting?" Then she repeated to her word for word the letter she had written, and told her of the novena of penances she had performed during the night that no one might know of them. "Believe me, daughter," she said, "we have motives of trust greater than our fears, and we have nothing to be afraid of but ourselves. God will not fail the Institute; let us strive on our side to be faithful and He is certain to preserve us. He did not gather us together in so miraculous a manner to let us be overthrown by the efforts of men; all that He has hitherto done was with far other purpose." The troubled soul of her listener was at peace.

One day—it was May 18, 1811,—the children of the boarding-school at Namur were making their first Communion. Meeting one of the happy band—little Clémentine Hubin—just after the great event, Julie stopped her and said: "My child, the good God is very pleased with you; He will grant you what you asked of Him this morning—you will be a nun some day." The child was radiant with joy at these words; she had, in

fact, earnestly begged of Our Lord, as she held Him for the first time within her heart, that He would deign to espouse her to Himself among the Sisters of Notre-Dame, though she had told her secret to none but Him.

The prediction was verified: Clémentine became that holy Sister Léocadie, who died Superior of the Convent at Thuin, in odour of sanctity, in 1831.

One after another of the Sisters who lived with Julie bears witness to her gift of penetration of hearts. Let us listen to Sister Gertrude Steenhaut:

“The solid satisfaction I have felt in letting myself be governed blindly by our Mother for more than ten years, proves to my mind beyond a doubt that she was led by the Spirit of God. I can say without a shadow of exaggeration that when she spoke I felt myself touched to the very depths of my soul.”

The same Sister relates:

“One day I met her near the refectory. She stopped and fixed her eyes on me for a few moments without speaking a word; then she said to me very gently, ‘Continue, my child, to occupy yourself with the sentiments which penetrate you now; meditate on these truths, going and coming, as you perform your duties; it will be an

excellent means of strengthening you in your vocation.' She then repeated the very words of the Gospel on which I had meditated that morning, and which had struck me in an unusual way. The wonderful penetration she showed in discovering each one's spiritual need inspired me with the liveliest confidence in her. She did not often allow us to speak to her about these matters, wishing to teach us forgetfulness of self, but we could easily perceive that one look of hers was often enough to lay open the most secret dispositions of our souls. Another day, after I had meditated before the Blessed Sacrament on these words of St. James, 'He who sins not with the tongue, the same is a perfect man,' I went to find our Mother in her room. As I entered she said to me, to my great astonishment, 'My child, believe me, there is a time to be silent and a time to speak'; and she sent me away before I could explain what I had come for.

"Again, on another occasion, I had taken for the subject of my meditation Our Lord despised and sent back from Pilate to Herod. I felt a great repugnance to bear humiliations, and I resolved to expose myself to them in all the little daily occasions which I was likely to meet, so as to combat my self-love. Directly after my prayer, God permitted that some pressing business required me to go to our Mother; she had

hardly opened the door before she shut it again, and sent me away without listening to me, having, no doubt, as on so many other occasions, read what was passing in my mind.

“Still more striking was this gift of hers when I was hesitating about writing out her daily conferences. I had long wished to do this, but did not venture without permission, and I thought of consulting Mère St-Joseph about it. One day, while I was praying in the chapel, my mind pre-occupied with this design, Mère Julie came up to me, and, giving me a tap on the shoulder, said: ‘Daughter, do not fail to write out the daily Conferences: God asks this of you.’”

Finally, the Jesuit Père Sellier, in the valuable paper on the virtues of the Servant of God which he dictated and signed at the age of eighty, bears the following witness:

“Thanks to her natural good sense and the lights she borrowed from her communications with the Divine Wisdom, she was gifted with singular penetration in the paths of interior life, and in the discernment of spirits. I have known several of our Fathers who used to submit to her the difficulties they met with in the guidance of souls, and even consult her on the direction of their own. I remember, among other cases, that of

a somewhat perverse and troublesome *dévoté*, who, having heard it said that simplicity was a powerful means of perfection, was seized with a desire to acquire that virtue. When questioned about this person, Mère Julie replied roundly: 'Content yourself with her good will; you may very easily make her mad; you will never make her simple.' And she was right."

Her eyes thus lifted to God, her hand thus locked in God's, her feet thus walking straight to God, how could her heart have failed to be ever in the liberty and peace of His children?

"Our Mother," writes Mère St-Joseph, "was by nature exceedingly ardent and active, full of life and fire; she suffered moreover from an affection of the nerves which generally gives rise to reverie and imaginations. Yet she was absolutely free from such influences; her mind was clear, accurate, and singularly free. She was never pre-occupied, never lost in her thoughts. No matter at what moment you accosted her, you were sure to find her at liberty; the business on hand was always welcomed by her, if it related to God's interests.

"The lively faith which animated her filled her with sentiments of the deepest respect and veneration for bishops and priests; but the simplicity

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of her soul never allowed her to give way to bustle or anxiety when she was treating with prelates or the great ones of this world. How often have I seen her on such occasions, keeping her mind fixed on God, awaiting the favourable moment, as peaceful under contradiction as though all had gone well with her. And if she were obliged to offer some explanation, it was easy to see by her limpid and facile language, and by the very expressions she used, that she had but one object in view—the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”

It is related of St. Ignatius that he would break off a quiet conversation to address a vehement reprimand to a Father, resuming immediately afterwards his first placidity, as if nothing had disturbed it. Much the same testimony is borne to Julie’s possession of her soul; after administering severe and energetic reproof, she would pass in perfect serenity to the holy table. Hence it came about, say the manuscript *Annals* of the Institute, that “no one ever left her with any feeling of rancour or annoyance; all one’s vexation was against oneself. Everyone was convinced of the perfect purity of her intention, and that she acted under the inspiration of grace.”

When ill or absent, she was never disturbed by any solicitude about the government of the

house. "God has no need of me," she would say, "to keep things going; I lay it all in the hands of His Providence."

What should Julie Billiardt reckon of the judgments of men concerning her? When Mère St-Joseph pointed out to her mistakes of spelling in her letters, she would thank her, but did not suffer her to correct them. "Let it stand, my daughter. Everyone ought to know that Mère Julie is only an ignorant woman, and that it is the good God Who does all."

She met all humiliations gaily. The good Flemish Sister Angèle often made the Sisters laugh by recounting an adventure of her youth. She was journeying to Amiens with Mère Julie, both habited in the famous pelisses of lilac print under which they carried their little bundles, and taking turns to ride on the donkey. As they entered the city, Julie, doubtless aware of the little struggle against human respect going on in the breast of her companion, made her mount, greatly to her confusion. Alas! arrived at the market place, her pelisse burst, and all the packets were showered on to the pavement. "Good luck! my daughter," cried the Saint, coming up to her assistance. "Oh, how good is the good God! Blessed be His Name for ever!"

She was, says Mère St-Joseph, speaking of her intercourse with all sorts and conditions of

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persons, "free without boldness, because she feared not blame and desired not approbation."

And she adds that she thinks "Our Lord might make, in Julie's regard, the same answer that He made of His servant Gertrude, when someone asked Him what most delighted Him in the Saint: 'It is,' He answered, 'the peace of her heart.' During the twenty-two years in which I had the happiness of living with her, I have never once seen her lose this precious peace."

"Mère Julie," said Mgr. Delebecque, "was verily a temple of peace."

If we rest our memory and thought on Julie's exterior life, the predominant feature which rises up before us is the Cross. "Suffering," writes Mère St-Joseph, "had become second nature to her." And the one other aspect of her sanctity which emphasizes itself to us is her passionate love of the Cross of Christ. Is it fanciful to note it? Two visions only have been registered for her; both are of Jesus and His Cross. The record of two gifts to her remains—at the beginning of her life the relic of the True Cross, the crucifix of Fontainebleau at the end.

Her letters, her instructions, her counsels, breathe a very passion of suffering.

"Do you know"—we quote from one of the conferences of the Retreat of 1814—"do you know what it is that fashions a soul? Crosses,

humiliations. I wish I had here all our Sisters from the secondary houses. In all my letters to them I come back upon this, that the cross alone will make them advance in the way of holy abandonment. A Sister of Notre-Dame must look to have many tribulations, many crosses . . . you must be sculptured, chiselled, by the cross, if you are to make any progress in the interior life."

"Let us be," she cried constantly, "*des âmes de croix*. Oh! my dear, dear daughters, let us love the cross. In the cross, just because they cherish it, true Sisters of Notre-Dame find peace."

Child of God, Lover of the Cross! so we think of Blessed Julie Billiart. And Holy Church, gathering into her collects the substance of her holiness, prays that like Julie, we may be permeated with the light of faith for the propagation of God's glory, that through the prayers of Julie, we may pass through the vicissitudes of the world in a great trust, and that, imitating in Blessed Julie that "undaunted love" of the Cross whereby she hath enriched the Church with a new family for the instruction of the daughters of the poor, we may by courageous endurance of sufferings attain to the joys of eternity.

CHAPTER XXI

Julie and the Children

IN the April of the year 1905 Pius X sent out his Encyclical on the Teaching of Christian Doctrine; in the May of the following year he solemnly beatified her whom we may call the Apostle of the Catechism, Julie Billiart.

Her biographer notes this sequence with joy. Following, then, the thought of the Holy Father, and with the strife against religious instruction in the schools of our country raging around us, we may well linger yet a little while to consider our Beata as she is especially the Instructress of the young, and gather together in this chapter the principles and practice of Christian Education as she conceived it.

In his masterly Encyclical, the Pope, after setting down as the main cause of the evils rife in the world, ignorance of things divine, impresses on pastors of souls the paramount importance of the duty of instructing all, but especially the little ones and the unlettered, in the truths of religion. And he points out how relatively rare is the skilled Catechist, and how imperative it is, if the teaching

of Christian Doctrine is to be effective, that he should bring to it special and most careful preparation.

To provide a perpetual stream of such skilled and apostolic catechists was, we may say, the very purpose of Mère Julie's Institute, which was founded precisely for this aim so dear to the heart of the Church, the gratuitous instruction of the poor, and especially their preparation for the reception of the Sacraments and their religious and moral formation. Its members bind themselves by a distinct vow to devote their lives, under obedience, to this work. Pupils of the better class are not excluded, and, as we have seen, schools for them existed almost from the beginning; but such schools are permissive, those of the poor, obligatory. "We must have poor everywhere," said Julie, "they are the cornerstone on which our edifice rests." "The poor are the benediction of our Institute."

As she opened the door of the class-rooms in the Poor School, she would exclaim with her beaming smile: "Oh! my children, how glad I am to come into the classes of the poor, for the good God loves the poor and so do I."

We have already learnt much of the high thoughts of Mère Julie with regard to the functions of the Catholic, and above all the Religious Teacher.

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"Amongst the Religious Orders," she said to her daughters, "some set themselves to imitate our Lord's prayer and expiation, His contemplative and crucified life; they do so by excessive poverty and extreme austerity. Others imitate His divine charity by the service of the sick and poor in hospitals and prisons. But we, my dear Sisters, have been inspired by God with the purpose of imitating especially the apostolic life of our Divine Master, by the Christian education of the children of our sex, above all amongst the poor. It is by the education of the rising generations that we are to form Christian mothers, Christian families, and to save countless souls."

The whole work of instruction was in her eyes a question of saving and forming souls; she never let her daughters forget this.

"Oh how great to the eyes of faith is the mission of a religious teacher! We must have noble souls, there must be nothing little about us, we must have the hearts of apostles. To form young souls for the good God, oh! what a consolation in God for a heart which loves Jesus Christ. Appreciate your happiness, my daughters, appreciate the grace of your high vocation."

"When I see you occupied in teaching," she says again, "You seem to me greater than all the potentates of the earth. And what are we, dear Sisters, that we should have the handling of souls

entrusted to us, poor little women like us! The angels envy our happiness."

Mère Julie had a natural love for children, to which her supernatural views of faith gave fresh ardour and purity. And the children, instinctively feeling this, and the sympathy which her own child-like spirit established with them, all through her life took to her at once.

The poor, especially, loved her, for with them she showed herself not only tender but caressing. As they flocked round her, says one witness, one seemed to see an image of Our Lord blessing little children.

She could manage the most troublesome. "One day," relates a former pupil of the Day School at Namur, "Mère Julie came into our class and found me kneeling in penance in the middle of the room. She asked what I had done and my mistress said: 'This little girl came late for the Catechism lesson because she went to fish in the river with some boys.' Reverend Mère Julie asked me if it was true; I told a lie and said 'No.' Then she began to exhort me, and I, on my side, began to cry so bitterly that I had to take my pocket handkerchief to dry my tears. In pulling it out of my pocket I scattered on the floor several of the little fishes I had caught, to my intense shame and confusion. Mère Julie seeing my humiliation did not scold me much, but she made me promise never

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to commit the same fault again, and above all never again to tell a lie. After that she made me ask my mistress's pardon and promise her to be good. And then she encouraged me and consoled me and begged the Sister not to give me any penance. I have never forgotten her indulgent kindness that day."

She did not like severe, nor above all hasty punishments. "Allow your thoughts to cool," she wrote to Sister St-Jean, "before reprimanding your pupils; weigh all your words in the presence of the good God before addressing them to the children." Her Sisters were to be very patient and very hopeful with troublesome scholars, helping them gradually to correct their faults of character as Our Lord Himself helped sinners, and trying by all the means in their power to fill them with an immense horror of sin. "We were no better at their age than they are," she would say. They were to speak to them with great courtesy and reverence, and, above all, were to pray constantly that the good seed sown in their hearts might bear fruit.

No devotedness, no self-sacrifice, was too much in their service. "We should be very miserable Sisters of Notre-Dame if we could not make sacrifices for our poor children."

Amongst the subjects of class instruction, the explanation of the Catechism and Sacred

History held, of course, the first place—indeed, in Julie's heart, the only one. She herself had a very gift not only for teaching the truths of religion to the mind, but of making them pass into the heart and the life. Of her Catechism lessons might be said what one of her daughters says of her conferences, "Her words not only enlightened, but transformed; one could not hear her without wishing to conform one's conduct to them." One of the first pupils of the boarding-school at Namur gives the following recollections: "It was above all when she prepared us for Confession and Holy Communion, that she formed us for our whole life. . . . She spoke much of purity, of the delight God takes in the pure soul. . . . What we chiefly loved was to have a Catechism lesson from Mère Julie. After that lesson we were carried quite out of ourselves; we loved the good God so much; with tender and naïve hearts we spoke of Him, and did all to please Him. When it was time for prayers Mère Julie used to say: 'Come, my children, the good God is listening to what you say to Him, but He wants the heart to say the same as the lips. Come, pray well, with your eyes cast down and your hands joined.' Then she would make a sign of the Cross which went to the depths of your soul. Sometimes, on the eves of great feasts, she would come and say night-prayers in the boarding-school for

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us, and she would wind up by the Acts in preparation for Holy Communion. I think she composed them as she went along, for they were not always the same and she had no book; they came from her very heart." And the dear old lady ends her narrative with this touching testimony: "She made us wish so much to receive the good God, do you see? that we were quite sad that a whole long night separated us from that happiness. I always think of Mère Julie when I go to Holy Communion, and I offer to God her dispositions who so much loved the good God and the Blessed Virgin and the Saints."*

The piety which she wished her daughters to instil into their pupils was to be a solid one, which would persevere with them when they went out into the world. "You must not want to make nuns of them, but good Christians, persons useful in society. If the good God wants them, He will call them. No little *dévotés*, please; we want great souls in our days if they are to persevere in good."

She constantly impressed on the mistresses the importance of inspiring a great love for Our Lady. She established her Sodality in all our houses of education, and would have her statue conspicuous in every class-room, for, she said, "as soon as the image of Mary is there, that class is won for heaven."

* Notes by Mlle. Thiry.

The whole education was to be simple and solid. In the school-buildings she attached the greatest importance to conditions of health, cleanliness and order, and adaptation to the purposes of education, but she did not like elegance or luxury. She waged a positive war against wasting time in much fancy-work and embroidery, as mischievous alike for mistresses and pupils. If these futilities once found their way amongst us, she said, our houses would soon be like millinery shops! If girls had a taste for fancy-work, let it be exercised on church vestments, but, even so, let them wait to the end of their school course, so that essentials might not be interfered with. She was inexorable in not allowing dancing lessons to be given in her schools. "I would rather shut them up," she said, "and put the key in my pocket." She was quite content to lose pupils in consequence of these principles; human considerations found no place in her, and the children of noble families were never spoilt by exceptions or privileges, but were only admitted on condition of their conforming to the school rules and customs. In the case of the poor, she checked anything which encouraged vanity and discontent with their station.

Everything connected with morals and the safeguarding of innocence had her most vigilant care. Hence she was exceedingly strict about

supervision. Once when she was making her visitation at Zèle, where there were then only four Sisters, she perceived at dinner hour, that they were all present in the refectory. After saying grace she left the table, and, as some time passed without her coming back, the Superior sent Sister Colette to look for her. She found her in the midst of the children, who, living in the country, brought their lunch with them, and were taking it in the courtyard. The Sister gave an exclamation of surprise. "Yes, daughter," said Julie gravely; "I am watching over your children, whom you leave to themselves. If you are not the Angel Guardian of your little ones, take off your veil and lay aside your crucifix, for you are not worthy of the great vocation of a Sister of Notre-Dame."

Hence also the wise insistence of the Foundress on the moral value of a well-filled life, and her encouragement of healthy amusements for the children. Among these it is quite characteristic that she mentions the cultivation of little gardens and the plentiful singing of hymns.

In these days, when cheap literature is accessible to the poorest, and when educational reformers are constantly preaching the value of wide and free reading even for young children, it is well to recall Mère Julie's views on the subject. She had a horror of novels, and even mere stories

seemed to her purposeless and idle reading, calculated to form a taste at best frivolous, at worst dangerous. In her single-hearted view such books, even when in no sense bad, tarnished the perfect limpidity of the young souls which she would keep so absolutely free for the workings of the grace of Jesus Christ. The world will smile at views so simple, and narrow, and old-fashioned. To us, even if, alas! the growth of the world's spirit among the young compels some modification of them, they are ever venerable, for they are the simplicity of the Saints and the fashion of Christ.

To go back in memory to those first schools of Notre-Dame, with their little scholars to whom the New Testament and the lives of Saints were the best of story-books, who found recreation in the singing of hymns, and to whom prayer and piety were the very atmosphere of their lives, is like going into some sweet-scented, old-world garden. And we doubt whether modern High Schools or Colleges turn out stronger and nobler women than those trained under the eye of Mère Julie and by the care of her first daughters.

CHAPTER XXII

“*Exaltavit Humiles*”

IN the centre of the beautiful garden of the “Maison-Mère” at Namur stands the little Gothic chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which we have already mentioned. Up and down the gravelled walks that lead to it, there pass, from early morning unto evening, many devout pilgrims; not only the Sisters going to and from their classes, not only postulants and white-veiled novices, but ecclesiastics who have asked to say there a Mass of Thanksgiving or of Petition, young seminarists come to implore help in their studies or examinations, workmen, peasant-women, little children. As we push open the oaken doors, we are confronted by the beautiful white marble statue of the Beata, executed in Rome by Tripisciano. We well remember how the sympathetic sculptor told us of his despair of catching *quel sorriso che ha qualche cosa d'Iddio*.^{*} He has succeeded.

To left and right the walls are becoming covered with ex-votos—marble tablets bearing comme-

^{*} That smile which has in it something of God,



MARBLE STATUE OF BLESSED JULIE IN THE GARDEN CHAPEL OF THE MOTHER-HOUSE, N. AMUR



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morative inscriptions in divers tongues, hearts gilt, or silver, or waxen, and one which catches the eye inevitably—a large sword suspended by a red riband stamped with the one word *Reconnaissance*. Its story is a pretty one. M. Arthur Henry was on the eve of being named an officer, when he accidentally received, during military practice, so serious a blow on the arm that the doctor declared amputation necessary. But his mother was an old pupil of Notre-Dame at Philippeville, where she had known contemporaries of the Servant of God, and on hearing the decision exclaimed: “There shall be no amputation, we will pray to Mère Julie.” She urged her son, who had been carried to the hospital at Louvain, to promise that he would offer his sword on the tomb of Julie Billiard if he were suffered to keep his arm, and to say each day one “Our Father” in her honour. When the surgeon arrived to perform the operation, he found the injured limb doing so favourably that he pronounced it unnecessary. After a slow convalescence, the young man returned home, and soon afterwards married. When his eldest boy was two years old, he fell against a stove, and burned his poor little hand so seriously that no remedy availed to cure it, and he seemed doomed to be maimed for life. Two of Arthur’s sisters were religious of Notre-Dame; once, when they came to make their

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annual retreat at the Mother-House, they received a visit from their brother, who told them of his child's misfortune. "Did you ever," asked the elder sister, "offer your sword at the tomb of our Mère Julie?" And Arthur was forced to acknowledge that he had felt unable to sacrifice so precious a souvenir. "Then," said his sister, "till you redeem your promise, do not expect your boy to be healed." So, on May 1, 1900, the sword, beautifully polished and slung on the scarlet riband, arrived at the Mother-House, and scarcely had it been laid upon the tomb than the child's hand was completely cured.

In the alcove behind the statue, which is shut off by fine wrought-iron gates, are three tombs in black marble, the sloping slabs of which bear respectively the names of Julie Billiart, Mère St-Joseph Blin de Bourdon and Mère Ignace Goethals. But the central one is empty, for the treasure it held for twenty-four years now rests above ground, exposed to the homage of the faithful. We turn our faces, then, to the right of the alcové, where stands an altar in carved oak, its reredos bearing statues of the Saints specially dear to the Institute—Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Aloysius, Stanislaus, Theresa, Francis of Sales. But we hardly note them, for our eyes fix themselves on the magnificent gothic shrine, in the style of the fifteenth century, beneath the altar-table. This



TOMB OF BLESSED JULIE IN THE GARDEN CHAPEL
AT NAMUR



THE SHRINE CONTAINING BLESSED JULIE'S RELICS

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shrine, the work of Messrs Dehin, of Liège, is a marvel of art in copper-gilt. Alto-reliefs in oxidized silver represent, on the two longer faces, four chief incidents in Julie's life; on one side, the blessed child catechizing her little comrades, and the vision of the Calvary at Compiègne; on the opposite one, the Ecstasy of the Purification and Julie's Death. The two end faces are occupied respectively with figures of Our Blessed Lady and of the Servant of God, while on the slopes of the roof are medallions in enamel of the symbols of the four Evangelists.

But between that April morning in 1816 when the dead body of Julie Billiard was carried to the city cemetery, and that other April day in 1906 when her bones were laid in the costly shrine, many stages have been passed. Let us briefly trace the story of her glorification.

Outside the garden-chapel, at the back of the annexe containing the three tombs, stands upright a large slab hewn of the blue nummulitic limestone of the district.

It bears the following inscription: “Here rests the body of the most virtuous Mother Julie Billiard, Foundress and Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, who died holily at Namur, April 8, 1816, aged 65 years. She consecrated the most precious moments of her life to the instruction of youth and the formation of those excellent

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houses of education, rightly considered the bulwarks of religion and morality. She founded the establishments of Amiens, Ghent, Bordeaux, Namur, Chartron, Montdidier, Rubempré, Jumet, Saint-Hubert, Zèle, Andenne, Gembloux, Fleurus, etc., and after having exhausted her strength by her excessive labours for the glory of God she fell asleep in the Lord, as much regretted by those who survived her as admired by those who knew her.

R.I.P."

This is the tombstone placed over the first grave of Mère Julie, the gift of Mgr. Pisani, and thus inscribed at his command by his Vicar-General, M. Médard. But, from the very beginning, there was evidently in the Institute the half-formed design of translating the blessed remains to the precincts of the Mother-House. And this, not only because none but the few Sisters who accompanied the pupils in their walks could enjoy the privilege of visiting their Mother's tomb—for, though uncloistered, the Sisters may not go out without due necessity—but because the heart of the Institute carried the memory of her sanctity and the belief in her beatitude, and both the one and the other were being corroborated from day to day by the favours received and the wonders wrought at her intercession. On the very night of her death, one of her best-be-



PANELS
FROM
THE
SHRINE
OF
BLESS-
ED
JULIE



loved daughters, Sister St-Jean, Superior of the Convent at St-Hubert, heard the curtains of her bed drawn swiftly back, and saw Mère Julie standing at her bedside. “Daughter,” she said in grave tones, “when did you do what I told you to do?” Recollecting that she had neglected to fulfil a commission laid upon her by her General, and never dreaming but that the latter had arrived, as she sometimes did, without sending word beforehand that she was coming, Sister St-Jean sprang from her bed exclaiming: “Oh, ma Mère! I beg your pardon,” but saw, to her astonishment, that she was alone in the room. On the morrow she related the occurrence to her Sisters, and two days later the tardy postal service brought to the little house in the Ardennes the news of its great loss.

A certain Sister Bridget was a prey to cruel interior troubles, to violent temptations, and to bitter desolation of spirit. After the death of the Foundress, she wrote from the secondary house where she then was to the Superior of Namur, begging her with childlike simplicity to carry her letter to Julie’s grave and there to read it aloud. The Superior did so, adding to the words of the poor Sister her own earnest petitions for her relief. No sooner had the last sentence of the letter died away on the air than the burden fell from Bridget’s soul; and she was filled with an

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ineffable peace. "We have seen with our own eyes," wrote the Sisters of Namur to those of Montdidier no more than a fortnight after the blessed Mother's death, "sick persons recover their health by praying devoutly at her tomb."

Mère St-Joseph, who, without a dissentient voice, was elected General on June 2, 1816, had called to Namur, to be her Assistant and Superior of the Mother-House, Sister Anastasie Leleu, Superior at Jumet. These two were, by excellence, the daughters of Mère Julie; better than all others they knew her—her holiness, her trials, her spirit; more than all others they venerated and loved her. In countless ways they kept brightly burning the flame of the Sisters' devotion to her, and Mère St-Joseph herself composed and distributed among them a Litany in her honour, which, from the pen of one who knew her so intimately, is striking testimony to her sanctity.

When, in July, 1816, Mgr. Pisani's sepulchral slab was ready, two Sisters went to overlook the fixing of it, accompanied by two trustworthy workmen. It was necessary to uncover the low wall surrounding the four sides of the grave, and the coffin was thus exposed to view. An irresistible desire seized the Sisters to look once more on the mortal remains of their Mother. They ordered the two workmen, Léanne and Mottiau,

both of them good Christians, to lift the lid of the coffin, and there, even as on the day of her death, lay the pure and venerable body of Julie Billiard, incorrupt, sweet, the cheeks still wearing the flush of life, the garments perfectly dry, the limbs quite flexible as they reverently moved them in this direction or that. The workmen themselves were filled with emotion at the sight. “We thought,” said François Mottiau simply when, years later, he was called upon to give his evidence, “we thought there was here something wonderful, and that *she was with God*.” He also stated the significant fact that a priest had told himself and Léanne to open the coffin without fear if they were called upon to do so, as some day or other a portion of the remains of Mère Julie would have to be sent to Rome.

The Sisters took from the hands of the Servant of God the small ivory crucifix which she had so often kissed and pressed to her heart. They also detached the large rosary of her religious habit and a portion of the shroud which wrapped her round. The lid of the coffin was then immediately replaced, and the stone slab adjusted to the grave; but it was only lightly cemented, for the project of securing the treasure it concealed now took definite shape in the minds of the Sisters.

When, on the return of the party to the Rue des Fossés, the relics of the Blessed Mother

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were delivered into the hands of Mère St-Joseph, the latter fell on her knees to receive them, her eyes streaming with tears, and then placed them, reverently and tenderly, in a room adjoining the sacristy.

Another motive than their filial veneration urged the two Superiors to hasten the execution of their daring enterprise. In 1815, Belgium had passed under the rule of the Dutch King, William I, and more than one arbitrary measure made Catholics fear for themselves an epoch, if not of violent persecution, at least of rigour and oppression. Should the public cemetery be changed, there was grave fear that the sacred remains would be desecrated, or at least permanently lost to the Institute.

In the spring of the year 1817, Mère St-Joseph caused a secret vault to be constructed at the bottom of the garden; over this was raised the little Gothic oratory, where a statue of the Blessed Virgin averted any suspicions of its real destination.

Late in the evening of July 17, 1817, a little band of Sisters again made their way to the grave at the foot of the Calvary. Mgr. Pisani had given his verbal permission for the undertaking, though without accepting any responsibility; M. Médard, Vicar-General and Ecclesiastical Superior of the Institute, had approved it; and the Sisters had

the support of Canon de Hauregard, formerly a lawyer, a man of weight and learning, who stood high in the Bishop's esteem, and became, later on, Protonotary Apostolic. He obtained for the Sisters the verbal consent of the municipal authorities, but urged them to conduct the affair with the utmost prudence. They paid the grave-diggers to remove the tombstone, and then easily persuaded them to withdraw to a distance while they satisfied their devotion. This time the Sisters themselves took off the lid of the coffin, and again their Mother lay before them untouched by the corruption of the tomb, fresh and beautiful as in the previous year, save that the finger-tips were slightly shrivelled. They lifted the body, wrapped it in the linen cloths they had brought with them under their cloaks, and, without mishap suffered or suspicion awakened, conveyed it to the Mother-House. The police had, in fact, been instructed to shut their eyes. Nearly sixteen months had elapsed since the death of the Servant of God; the weather was extremely hot; yet the movements necessary to lift the body from the coffin, to carry it to the Convent, and to place it in the new coffin, had absolutely no effect on its integrity. From it exuded a quantity of clear oil which stained the cloths in which it was wrapped, and even the wooden floor of the room whereon it was laid for a moment. It was at once placed in

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the garden-crypt, but Mère St-Joseph prudently forbade all external marks of veneration, and the secret was the exclusive possession of the Professed Sisters, the novices being only admitted to it on the eve of taking their first vows. Hence the devotion to the Servant of God did not spread to any great extent beyond the precincts of Notre-Dame; within these it always flourished, Sisters and pupils invoking the Blessed Mother with the utmost confidence.

In consequence of the frequent inundations of the Sambre and Meuse, the little vault was often under water, and when in 1842 it was opened to receive the body of Reverend Mother Ignace Goethals, the flesh had crumbled to dust and the bones alone remained: these were now enclosed in a small chest. Thirty-eight years later, in 1880, an exceptionally serious flood induced the ecclesiastical authorities to permit the construction of a new tomb at a higher level; the annexe mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was then thrown out at the back of the chapel, and there, on December 14, 1882, were placed the mortal remains of the Servant of God.

Was it an aroma from the precious deposit thus newly stirred that breathed into the heart of the General who then governed the Institute the thought that the time of waiting was over, and that the moment had come for initiating the glo-

rification of the Foundress? Whilst making her retreat in the March of 1881, the gentle and holy Mère Aloysie Mainy, fifth Superior-General of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, felt strongly urged to take the step, and approached Mgr. Gravez, Bishop of Namur, on the subject. The Bishop passed her letter to his secretary, bidding him answer it in the affirmative. “But, my Lord,” said the latter in great surprise after reading the letter, “do you realize that the matter here broached is an extremely grave one? Will not your Lordship take some time for prayer and reflection before replying?” “The person who wrote that letter,” answered the Bishop, “has already prayed and reflected before God.” And so, in the dioceses of Namur, Mechlin, Amiens and Bordeaux, ecclesiastical tribunals were erected to institute the threefold inquiry into the Heroicity of the Virtues of the Servant of God, her Reputation for Holiness, and the Miracles worked at her intercession. Devotion to her received a fresh impetus and took a wider range, and cures both of soul and body were multiplied at her hands. One of her great-nieces, who always wore her relic, falling under the feet of a cart-horse, was saved by invoking her name in the moment of danger. A former pupil of the Sisters, who had strayed from the path of virtue and had no thought of returning to it, was pursued in her soul—even as she would

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have been by the living Julie—with repeated secret warnings and admonitions, and finally won back to God by a wonderful apparition.

To give a full account of many of the miracles attributed to Mère Julie would be impossible; they can be read in the Acts of the Apostolic Process. The majority of them were worked, as we should have expected, on behalf of the poor and lowly. We may fitly, however, give in some detail the three miracles solemnly ratified by the Sacred Congregation of Rites for the Beatification. The first took place in 1882.

Armand Hubin, of the village of Oteppe in the diocese of Liège, was one day coming back from school when he was seized with a sharp pain in the lower part of the left leg. A small pimple formed in the middle of the shin bone, which rapidly degenerated into a wound the size of which increased from day to day. Large quantities of matter and pieces of bone came from the sore, and four doctors in succession declared the boy's case to be a very pronounced form of caries of the bones. Sometimes, for half a day or so, the running ulcer would close of itself, with the invariable result that the pains were greatly intensified; then it would spontaneously re-open, there would be an abundant discharge of matter and a temporary relief. The leg was very much swollen, and the pains were aggravated by the

fever they induced. The patient was visibly wasting away, and, after long months of unavailing treatment, the physicians declared that the only chance lay in an operation. But Mme. Hubin would not hear of it. The disease became worse and worse; the doctors finally gave the child up, and all remedies were forgone. Just at this juncture a friend spoke to Mme. Hubin of Mère Julie Billiart, and urged her to go to Namur and pray for her son at the tomb. The poor mother went, though she knew neither the town nor the convent of Notre-Dame. After much wandering, she at last found the Rue des Fossés, told the portress why she had come, and was welcomed with the utmost kindness. She poured forth earnest prayers at the tomb of the Servant of God, and, on leaving, received from the Sisters a fragment of her garments with the injunction to place it on the wound in her son's leg and begin a novena in her honour. “Have confidence!” they said, and the woman, with the simple faith which Julie so loved, on her return to Oteppe that evening at once put their advice into practice. On the morrow there was a marked change for the better, and the discharge of matter ceased. On the second day of the novena Armand suddenly exclaimed, beside himself with joy: “Mother! I am cured. The wound has gone and I have no more pain.” So it was: all swelling had disappeared, all fever, all pain; the ulcer was

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completely healed. Armand recovered appetite and put on flesh, and grew to vigorous and healthy manhood without any relapse, only keeping for a memory of the touch of Julie's hand, the light scar of his long-open wound.

The second and very similar miracle shall be given in the words of the subject of it, Noël Grégoire, master-joiner at Jambes in the province of Namur. He says:

"At the age of nine, after a bad fall, I was attacked by caries of the bones in the right leg; a running wound formed in the limb. This lasted for two years. I consulted no doctor, but made use of a few simple remedies, and often washed the sore under running water. There came from it several small pieces of bone, after which it gradually closed up. For some seven or eight years I had no further trouble with it, but then again began to experience frequent pain in my leg. At the beginning of August, 1881, my sufferings became more intense. I went to a doctor, but his treatment gave me no relief. Often I rolled in agony on the floor, unable to bear the violence of the pain. I could no longer sleep; I could no longer eat; I was visibly wasting away. I consulted another physician: he gave me some relief, but the pains were still excruciating.

"On the Feast of All Saints, Mlle. Adolphine Defoin, who belonged to the Congregation of the

Children of Mary established at the Convent of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, brought me that which was to effect my cure, a relic—namely, of the Reverend Mother Julie Billiart, Foundress of the Institute of Notre-Dame. As soon as the precious relic was in my possession, I felt the greatest confidence in the venerated Mother. I began a novena during which I stopped the use of all remedies. Full of hope and trust, I applied the relic to the most painful part of my leg, and immediately felt my sufferings diminish. Next night I slept peacefully, which I had not done for twenty-five nights past. My complete cure through the instrumentality of that precious relic was the affair of two or three days only. Sleep and appetite came back to me, and I rapidly recovered strength. The intolerable pains which had tortured me day and night for three months vanished entirely. I went back to my occupations; never have I worked so hard as since my cure, and the curious thing is that I feel more strength and vigour in the right leg from which I suffered so much than in the left one which never had anything the matter with it. I attest and affirm that I owe my cure to the application of the relic of the venerated Mère Julie Billiart, and that this complete and rapid cure was effected in two or three days. Full of gratitude to my benefactress, I laid a garland upon her tomb,

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and I proclaim aloud that it is to her I owe my cure."

But perhaps the most remarkable of the three miracles was that worked in 1886 on Louis Waelens, husbandman in the hamlet of Ruysselede in the diocese of Bruges. Drawn by lot for the conscription at the age of twenty, he served his time in the army, and then gave himself to agricultural labours, leading a peaceful and sober life, and never suffering from illness up to the age of thirty-six. Diseases of the stomach, however, ran in the family; one sister had already died therefrom, and now Louis was attacked with the first symptoms of gastritis and an internal ulcer—chronic indigestion, great pain after food, swelling of the stomach and frequent sickness. As time went on the sick man completely lost appetite; all food, whether solid or liquid, was returned, and with it was thrown up a thick mucous matter. He could scarcely ever get any sleep, and every night his wife had to get up several times to prepare hot poultices to alleviate the intolerable internal pains. His weakness was such that he was incapable of any work, and he became so emaciated that he looked like a living skeleton. In 1884 he began to vomit large quantities of blood, and in one frightful crisis, after bringing up about half a pint, was at the point of death. This state of affairs lasted for about twenty-eight



LOUIS WAELENS

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years. The most celebrated physicians had been successively consulted, but were powerless to give the sufferer any relief, let alone to effect his cure.

On Saturday, October 30, 1886, Louis went with his wife to consult a chemist in Bruges. Mme. Waelens there heard that a Sister of Notre-Dame called Mère Julie was obtaining wonderful cures, and was told that at the Convent at Beernem—a town which she had to pass on her way home—she might procure a relic of the Servant of God. Her poor husband, who was just then a prey to even keener sufferings than usual, willingly consented, and waited in the road while his wife poured her trouble into the ears of the Sister Superior. The latter gave the poor woman a relic of the Servant of God, recommending her at the same time to begin a novena in her honour consisting of a *Pater* and an *Ave* daily. Waelens reverently placed the relic in his waistcoat pocket, and there and then, as they walked along, began the novena with his wife. Instantaneously his pains vanished and his appetite returned. On reaching home he supped heartily with his family, and then slept soundly. In the middle of the night he woke up his wife that she might get him, not poultices, but two slices of bread and butter and a cup of milk. He then slept again till morning. In a few days his strength had returned and he

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resumed work; nor did he ever feel any effects of his former malady. When, in 1890, he was officially examined by a doctor of Namur, he was a fine, hale man of sixty-eight, tall, rather thin, supple and alert, in perfect health, of open and happy countenance, the type of the *mens sana in corpore sano*.

As graces and favours multiplied, Postulatory Letters begging for the definitive Introduction of the Cause of Julie Billiart poured in to the Holy See from all quarters. Princes of the blood-royal, as Joseph Francis I, Emperor of Austria, the Empress Dowager Mary Anne, the Queen of the Belgians, Francis II, King of Naples, the Countess of Chambord, Princesses Marguerite and Blanche of Orleans, Prince George, Duke of Saxony, Charles III, Prince of Monaco, and the Grand-Duchess of Tuscany; Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church and Bishops in all parts of the world, among whom we love to note Mgr. Goethals, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Bengal, linked as he is with the Institute both by circumstances and by blood; noble names like de Rochefoucauld, de Broglie, Croy, de Mérode, Ligne, Hohenlohe, d'Ursel, de Stolberg, Talbot—with the Picard names de Beaussier, de Franssu and, dearest of all, Blin de Bourdon; all these with one voice petitioning for the glorification of the village-maiden, the poor and palsied invalid, the



Actum in nimbis honoratis sancti anni tui 1906

Romae die 13 Maii 1906

*+ Raphael M^r Episc. Brodinski
Post. Paul. Com: B. Julius Biliński*

MGR. VIRILI

Postulator of the Cause.

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persecuted religious: *A Domino factum est istud, et est mirabile in oculis nostris.*

To all these were joined the voices of many Religious Orders and Congregations; the Society of Jesus to which the beginnings of the Institute owe so much, the Order of the Visitation, the Sisters of the Nativity, of Valence, founded by Mme. de Franssu, the Carmelites and the Ladies of the Sacred Heart with whom the Sisters of Notre-Dame have a special spiritual kinship.

On June 25, 1889, Leo XIII set his *placet* to the commission for the Introduction of the Cause; the pontifical decree styling Julie in happy phrase, “an eminent labourer in the harvest of the Lord,” —*insignis in messe Domini operaria.*

From that time the Cause moved steadily on without obstacle through its different stages, furthered by many a devoted and energetic friend of the Institute and client of the Venerable Julie Billiart—by the first-named Cardinal *Relator*, His Eminence Gaetano Aloisi Masella, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, by Mgr. Caprara, by the indefatigable Postulator of the Cause, Mgr. Raphael Virili, Bishop of Troas.

In the spring of 1897 the voluminous budget of the Apostolic Process was sent to Rome for examination. That same year, at the request of the then General, Reverend Mother Aimée de Jésus,

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the Pope named as Protector of the Congregation of Notre-Dame Cardinal Dominic Ferrata, himself sometime Prefect of the Sacred Congregation, and who, when Nuncio at Brussels, had been in intimate relation with Julie's daughters. Thanks to his untiring efforts and paternal interest, the termination of the Cause was considerably accelerated.

On January 6, 1903, was held in presence of the Sovereign Pontiff the third and last discussion on the Heroicity of the Virtues of the Servant of God. When all the Cardinals and Consultors had given in their votes, Leo XIII, whose own vote, according to the formalities prescribed for the process of a Beatification, was held in reserve till he had further implored the counsels of the Most High, dismissed the august assembly with these words of precious and significant reminiscence, inserted, according to his desire, in the Decree *Providentissimus Deus* promulgated two days later:

"We keep, deep graven on our mind, an old and ever sweet memory of the Venerable Servant of God, Julie Billiart. In fact, when we were exercising in Belgium the functions of Apostolic Nuncio—that was sixty years ago—many and many a time have we heard venerable members of the clergy and even of the episcopacy highly extol the holiness of this remarkable woman, who had



CARDINAL FERRATA

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established in that country, at Namur namely, the Mother-House of her Institute. And now, in to-day's assembly, by your unanimous votes and those of the Consultors, the excellence of her virtues has seemed to shine forth yet more brightly before our eyes. And so we desire that the study of this Cause be brought as soon as possible to the wished-for termination, and add unto Holy Church a new lustre and a fresh ornament, and happily succeed for the benefit of the nations of Belgium and of France. Nevertheless, we reserve to another time, as the custom is, the promulgation by decree of our own judgement upon the virtues of Julie Billiart.” *

At last, on the Feast of St. Joseph, 1906—(was not the date, perchance, another delicate attention of Divine Providence, linking together in the joyful reaping names long linked in the sorrowful sowing?)—appeared the Decree of Beatification,

* *Venerabilis Dei Famulae Juliae Billiart alte nobis insidet mentivetuseaque iucunda recordatio. Quo enim tempore (sexaginta iam elapsi sunt anni) Nuntii Apostolici munere apud Belgas fungebamur, saepenumero graves e clero viros atque etiam episcopos audivimus efferre cum laudibus sanctimoniam hujus praeclarissimae Feminae, quae illic, scilicet Namurci, sedem Instituti sui principem collocaverat. At vero in hodierno conventu excellentia virtutum ejus per unanimes vestras et consultorum sententias visa est Nobis emicare splendidius. Vota hinc nuncupamus ut cognitio hujus causae quantocius ad optatum exitum progressa, novum addat Ecclesiae sanctae ornamentum et decus, et Belgarum et Gallorum genti feliciter benevertat. Verumtamen de virtutibus Juliae Billiart decreto-rium nostrum proferre indicium, ut moris est, reservamus.*

and the ceremony at St. Peter's was fixed for the 13th of the following May.

In the interim arrived at Namur, duly sealed, the documents necessary to the authentic opening of the tomb and the official recognition of the mortal remains of the Servant of God. At 9 a.m. on April 9, a little procession made its way to the garden chapel; Mgr. Heylen, Bishop of Namur, who officiated in place of the Very Reverend Promoter of the Faith; Father Van Sull, S.J., acting as Vice-Postulator on behalf of the Postulator, Mgr. Virili; the witnesses officially appointed; two physicians and the necessary workmen. Immediately the doors were closed; the minutes of the former openings of the tomb were read aloud by the Secretary of the Tribunal; the oaths were administered to the witnesses and the medical men, and the grave was uncovered. The coffin was lifted out and placed on a litter draped with silk and white lilies; four priests raised it on their shoulders, and the cortège, now swollen by a numerous clergy all bearing lighted tapers, crossed the garden, every path of which was lined with Sisters and novices, to the chant of the Office for Virgins, and entered the great assembly-hall of the boarding-school. Here were prepared two tables, covered with crimson damask and white linen cloths; on a third table stood three small chests destined for the reception of the relics, the first of ebony lined in white satin

for the Sovereign Pontiff, the second of mahogany for the Bishop of Namur, the third of oak to be enclosed in the Gothic shrine for the Mother-House. In the presence of some thirty ecclesiastics, the bishop ordered the coffin to be opened—first the outer one of lead, then the inner oaken one, and finally the zinc chest covered with white silk wherein lay the venerable bones. These, which were in a beautiful state of preservation, were placed by the hands of the priests upon the damask cloths and there submitted to a minute medical examination. The doctors drew up a fresh report, and the bishop proceeded to apportion the relics to the three chests, which he then closed and sealed. He himself undertook to deliver the ebony chest into the hands of Mgr. Raphael Virili; the two others were borne processionally to the little chapel, there to remain concealed, conformably to the prescriptions of the Church, until after the Beatification.

The 13th of May dawned fair and beautiful in the Eternal City. The Mass was fixed for 9.30, but it was not yet nine when seven Sisters of Notre-Dame crossed the sunlit Piazza of St. Peter. High up over the great central entrance to the Basilica hung a large piece of green drapery; this veiled a picture of the new Beata much resembling the *Apotheosis* within the Church, and to be uncovered at the same moment. Beneath

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this, but under the portico and immediately over the great bronze door, was a large gilt-framed picture of Blessed Julie succouring the soldiers wounded at Waterloo. On either side this was flanked by Latin inscriptions; on the right:

“France, which brings up great souls, hath introduced among the citizens of heaven Julie Billiard. O Daughter, look down from heaven upon thy mother, and preserve her strong in that faith of Christ whence throughout all the ages she hath drawn the dignity of her name.”*

On the left:

“By Decree of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius X, the honours of the Blessed in Heaven are adjudged to Julie Billiard, Mother and Foundress of the Sisters of the august Mother of God. Hasten, ye Citizens and ye Strangers, to do honour to this Heroine distinguished by her virtue.”†

*GALLIA

MAGNARUM ANIMARUM ALTRIX

JULIAM BILLIART

COELITIBUS INTULIT.

O NATA

PARENTEM DE COELO RESPICE,

FORTEM IN FIDE X^{TI} SERVA

UNDE PER AETATES OMNES

AMPLITUDINEM NOMINIS HAUSIT.

† DECRETO

PII X PONTIFICIS MAXIMI

HONORES COELITUM BEATORUM

JULIAE BILLIART

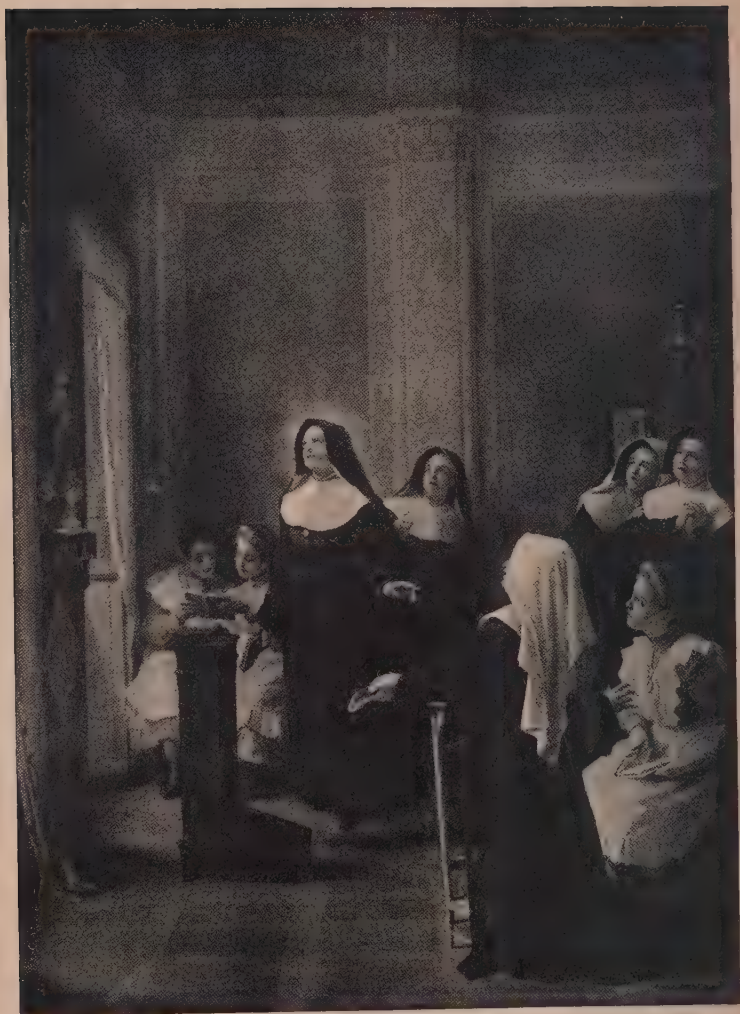
DEFERUNTUR

MATRI LEGIFERAE SORORUM A DEIPARA AUGUSTA.

ADESTE, CIVES, ADVENAE,

HEROIDEM VIRTUTE EXIMIAM

VENERAMINOR.



THE ECSTASY

From the Picture hung in St. Peter's at the Beatification of Blessed Julie

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Within the Basilica the whole space between the “Confession” and the Altar of the Chair of St. Peter was draped with crimson and gold, and festooned with beautiful chandeliers of electric candles. The great gilt aureola over the Chair was surrounded by a crown of seventeen huge electric stars, concave and six-rayed. This encircled the *Apotheosis*, which was still veiled. On either side of it hung large oil-paintings—on the right, of the Ecstasy of the Purification and the cure of Noël Grégoire; on the left, of the cures of Louis Waelens and of Armand Hubin. At the lower end of the apse, just outside the enclosure, were displayed the arms of the Institute and of Namur. On either side of the apse ran the tribunes, three deep and draped in crimson and gold; orchestra and choir occupied the central ones, the Sisters of Notre-Dame the upper one on the Gospel side, nearest the altar.

At a quarter-past nine, twelve candles were lit upon the altar, and then, in three successive bursts, separated from each other by about two seconds, six thousand electric lights flashed the whole apse into glory. Only the stars round the veiled picture remained as yet in darkness. At half-past nine the brilliant procession entered; first the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation, benching in a long line of magnificent scarlet on the lowest tier on the Gospel side, save only

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Cardinal Rampolla, who, as Archpriest of the Basilica, filled the first place on the opposite side; next the Archbishops and Bishops, a scarcely less magnificent line of purple on the Epistle side; then the Prelates and ecclesiastics, the Religious of the different Orders, and the Seminarists. Crossing and recrossing the open space moved Mgr. Raphael Virili, directing every detail, his benevolent and peaceful countenance radiant with joy. It was to his artistic taste and devoted care that the beautiful and effective decorations and illuminations were entirely due. In the uppermost tribune nuns and ladies held out their hands to the little band of Julie's daughters in friendly clasp, as they recognized their habit in that of the paintings above the altar. Among the latter was one who claimed blood-relationship alike with the Blessed Foundress and with the Carmelites of Compiègne. "Ah," laughed the Holy Father when he heard it, "mais les deux, c'est un peu trop." To the right of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, in a small box specially reserved for them, sat the Pope's sisters.

The ceremonies began. Mgr. Virili, Postulator of the Cause, presented himself, together with the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, before Cardinal Tripepi, and, handing him the Apostolic Brief, begged him in a short Latin speech, delivered in a voice overcome with emotion, to



THE APSE OF ST. PETER'S, ROME, ON THE DAY OF THE BEATIFICATION



THE APOTHEOSIS

From the Picture exhibited at the Beatification of Blessed Julie

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order its publication. The Cardinal Prefect passed him over to Cardinal Rampolla for permission to publish the Brief in his Basilica. This granted, the Secretary mounted a small rostrum and in a loud, clear voice read aloud the long Latin brief, *Quod Joannes vidit*. Then immediately the *Te Deum* was intoned by the celebrant, Mgr. Boccanera, Titular Archbishop of Nicosia, and taken up by the ecclesiastics, the choirs, which were under the direction of Maestro Perosi, singing the alternate verses. But simultaneously with the first notes of the Canticle of Thanksgiving the relics of the Beata, in a magnificent reliquary, were borne in and placed upon the altar, and the whole vast assembly fell upon its knees to do them honour. At the same moment the great electric stars sprang into light, the curtain rose in front of the *Apotheosis*, and with an indescribable thrill of emotion all eyes, few unfilled with tears, were lifted to the beautiful transparency of the Servant of God in glory. The light behind the picture was so managed as specially to irradiate the face and head of the Beata who, with upturned eyes, knelt upon the clouds surrounded by angels bearing the symbols of her virtues—the lily of Purity, the scourge of Penance, the rosary of Prayer, the Book of the Rules.

At the *Kyrie* Mgr. Virili called out the Belgian Seminarists, to whom by a delicate thought had

been assigned the task of distributing the customary souvenirs of the Beatification. They bore them round on large silver salvers—Italian Lives of the Blessed Julie handsomely bound, in scarlet for the Cardinals, in purple for the Bishops and the members of the Institute present, in green for the rest of the clergy, and her picture tied round with gold-fringed ribands of corresponding colours from which hung a silver medal of the Servant of God. At the end of the Mass, too, a large number of small illustrated Lives were given away to the faithful. The Mass was the Common of Virgins, with special and beautiful Collect, Secret and Postcommunion.*

The afternoon ceremony, at which the Holy Father assists, took place at 5. At least 50,000 persons were present, and the *coup d'œil* in the apse was even more brilliant than in the morning, for the members of the Diplomatic Corps were there in full uniform and decorations, and the Camerieri in their picturesque dress—Elizabethan ruffs and short velvet cloaks, knee-breeches and swords, while the tribunes were filled with nuns of every habit and Order. Among the bishops was conspicuous the tall, slight figure of Mgr. Mercier, the new Archbishop of Mechlin. In front of the sanctuary were set a gilt faldstool and chair upholstered in white silk;

* See Appendix.



HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS X

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the reliquary still gleamed upon the altar. As before, there was the instantaneous illumination, and an audible murmur of admiration went through the assembly at each burst of glory. But suddenly there pulsed through the great crowd another and different thrill; the organ began to play, the great stars shone out around the *Apotheosis*, the far-away oblongs of light at the bottom of the immense Basilica went out in darkness as the doors were closed, handkerchiefs began to wave, the suppressed acclamation which no printed prohibitions avail to check heaved onward through the living mass, eyes grew dim with tears of faith, and there was a great sob of emotion at the heart—the Pope had come. All eyes turned towards the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, and one was only dimly conscious of the splendid procession winding gradually up the nave into the apse-enclosure—the purple-clad Protonotaries, the gorgeous Cardinals and the Court. Then, moving slowly, slowly up round the great Baldacchino, appeared the red and gold *sedia gestatoria*, borne with rhythmic precision by the twelve crimson-clad Domestici, and showing aloft the white figure of the Holy Father, in cassock, rochet and mosesta, his head slightly bent, his raised hand blessing the people to the right and to the left. When the centre of the apse was reached the bearers slowly lowered the sedia

and the Noble Guard presented arms as the Pope came forth and took his place on the faldstool to venerate the relics of her whom he had proclaimed Blessed, while the *Capella* sang, unaccompanied, a motet in her honour. Once again they were together—in other wise than ninety-three years ago—Mère Julie and the persecuted Vicar of Jesus Christ: he knelt the whole time motionless, with folded palms and grey head bowed, talking with her (who can doubt it?) even as that other Pius, his predecessor, of *les maux de la Sainte Eglise*.

Solemn Benediction was given by Mgr. Heylen, Bishop of Namur, he and his assistants kneeling, on account of the pontifical presence, on the steps at the Epistle side. The incensings were made by the Pope himself, the thurible being presented to him by the stately and saintly-looking Cardinal Rampolla, whose lips, as he knelt in the midst of the scarlet sweep of Cardinals, moved in ceaseless prayer. At the moment of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Noble Guard, who had been standing behind the Holy Father, dropped on one knee, lowered their swords with their left hands, and raised their right hands in simultaneous military salute to the King of Glory. Then followed the customary presentation to the Pope of the relic and Life of the new Beata together with a superb bouquet; while the little



BLESSED JULIE'S ROOM AT CUVILLY DECORATED FOR
THE FEAST OF THE BEATIFICATION

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ceremony was taking place, Mgr. Virili looked up to the tribune where knelt the deputation of Sisters of Notre-Dame, and a moment later saw them moving in single file to the Holy Father's chair to kiss his ring in a last act of grateful homage, whilst he, bending kind eyes upon Julie's children, and taking their hands, too, in his in fatherly clasp, laid his own, as in special blessing, on the head of her who, little more than a year from that day, was to fill the Blessed Mother's place to the Institute.

Rome had spoken, and now the different towns in which the Sisters of Notre-Dame have establishments took up the note of triumph in solemn Triduum. In the opening one at Namur the third panegyric was fittingly entrusted to Mgr. Dizien, Bishop of Amiens, and splendid processions conducted the shrine of relics from the Mother-House to the Cathedral and from the Cathedral back to the Mother-House. In the April of 1907 came the magnificent three days' celebration in Rome, at the Church of the *Gesù*, with pontifical High Masses celebrated successively by Mgr. Heylen of Namur, Cardinal Mercier of Mechlin, and the Cardinal Protector Ferrata. Cuvilly, too, had its *fêtes*, and the poor little room in the Rue de Lataule was humbly and touchingly decorated.

Many were the conversions obtained during these days of grace. Blessed Julie's portrait, the

sight of her relics, touched countless hardened and sin-stained hearts. Here an unbaptized woman suddenly announces, after going up to venerate the Blessed Servant of God, that she *will make her peace with the good God*, and receive the Sacrament of regeneration with all her children; there a workman who had not crossed the threshold of a church for thirty years cannot resist the desire to assist at the new festivities, and confesses simply that on the first day he had *found his Hail Mary again*, but his *Our Father* only on the third; that henceforward he shall go on praying. Many dying sinners who, till then, had refused to see a priest, willingly accepted the gift of the smiling portrait of *La Bienheureuse*, and hastened to beg for a confessor. Traits like these bear upon them the very stamp of Julie's apostolate. Hundreds of men, especially, went everywhere to Communion, and a veritable current of grace seemed to stir the populace. *Notre Sainte, la Sainte qui sourit*, so the good people of Namur tenderly and proudly called her. And they said well; all Julie is in their words, for us all. "*Our Saint*"—she who moves among the poor, and the little, and the suffering, and the lowly, *femme comme nous* as the Namurois say again;—and "the Saint who smiles,"—"rejoicing in the Lord always," and therefore smiling ever both to heaven and to earth;—up to God, with the happy smile of His undoubting

child, down to men and women and children with the kindly smile of a mother, the one and the other alike lit up upon her lips by that secure faith of her heart that “the good God is very good.”

HYMN TO
Blessed Mère Julie

LONG have we looked to see thy day,
 Mother and Patron dear,
 To know thee loved throughout the Church
 As we have loved thee here;
 To see the Faithful, too, rise up
 And call thee Blest, as we,
 For God is wondrous in His Saints,
 And wonderful in thee.

A spark from out the Heart of Christ
 Fell early on thy breast,
 And thou wouldst seek for little souls,
 In simple touching quest.
 Sweet child-apostle, teaching thus
 The babes of Picardy,
 God, Who is wondrous in His Saints,
 Was wonderful in thee.

Like Jesus, thou didst pass thy youth
 Poor, and in labour rude,
 Then for long years wast crucified
 In pain and solitude.
 Thy body bound, thy soul soared up
 On wings of ecstasy,
 And God, so wondrous in His Saints,
 Was wonderful in thee.

Men hunted thee from place to place
 When faith and love were cold,
 Because thy valiant word of fire
 Made weaker spirits bold.

Hymn to Blessed Mère Julie 557

Martyr in will, no tempest shook
Thy soul's most tranquil sea,
For God, so wondrous in His Saints,
Was wonderful in thee.

Healed in the Name of that dear Heart
To which thy life was sworn,
Within its rift of love and pain
Thy Company was born.
Around the Cross in vision blest
Didst thou the children see
Whom God, still wondrous in His Saints,
Drew wondrously to thee.

That "God is good," was all thy song
Throughout thy thorny ways,
His Mother's sweet *Magnificat*,
Thy dying note of praise:
Oh! may thy large and simple Faith
Our strength and gladness be!
Since God, so wondrous in His Saints,
Was wonderful in thee.

And may we walk with lifted eyes,
As God's own children should,
Our hand locked trustingly in His,
Because He is so good.
Oh, Blessed Julie! Keep our hearts
Strong, tender, true, and free!
For, God, yet wondrous in His Saints,
Is wonderful in thee.

PROVISIONAL MASS
OF
Blessed Julie Billiart

April 8

MASS. *Dilexisti as in Common of Virgins, except:*

COLLECT

O GOD, Who hast willed, that Blessed Julie should, through her undaunted love of Thy Cross, enrich Thy Church with a new family for the instruction of the daughters of the Poor, grant through her intercession that by courageous endurance of sufferings, we may attain to the joys of eternity. Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

SECRET

MAY Thy Holy Spirit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, flood us, who are handling these divine mysteries, with that light of Faith, where-with He ever illumined Blessed Julie for the furtherance of Thy glory. Through Jesus Christ etc.

POSTCOMMUNION

GRANT, O Lord, that we, who have been refreshed by this heavenly banquet, may, through the prayers of Blessed Julie, ever firmly trust in Thee, in the midst of our earthly trials. Through Jesus Christ etc.

DIE XIII MAJI
IN SOLEMNIIS BEATIFICATIONIS

B. Juliae Billiart

VIRGINIS

MISSA. *Dilexisti de Communi Virginis præter
sequentia :*

ORATIO

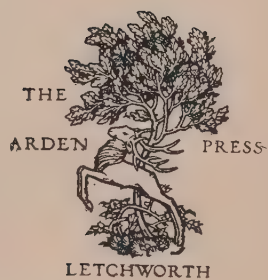
DEUS, qui per invictum tuæ crucis amorem Beatam Juliam nova ecclesiam tuam familia in pauperum puellarum eruditionem fœcundare voluisti; da, ipsa intercedente, ut per constantem tolerantiam passionum æternitatis gaudia consequamur. Qui vivis.

SECRETA

ILLA nos, quæsumus, Domine, divina tractantes, Spiritus Sanctus fidei luce perfundat; qua Beatam Juliam, ad gloriæ tuæ propagationem, jugiter collustravit. Per Dominum.

POSTCOMMUNIO

CÆLESTI convivio refectos fac nos, Domine, Beata Julia deprecante, ut inter mundanas vicissitudines in te semper firmiter confidamus. Per Dominum.





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